Please note opening night date as listed in cast box. New York newspapers have been delayed in printing the reviews due to publishing difficulties.

New York Theatre Critics' Reviews 1953

Volume XIV, Number 25 • Rachel W. Coffin, *Editor* • Week of December 21, 1953

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of December 21, 1953*

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK MIRROR
NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK TIMES

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"Oh, Men! Oh, Women!"

Daily Mirror

December 18, 1953

'Oh, Men! Oh, Women' A Riotous Romp

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Don't let the title scare you off. "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" is the funniest, wackiest, cockeyedest comedy to hit the Main Stem in a long time. Though Edward Chodorov makes no pretensions to deep thought or literary quality in this riotous romp, he does have a few trenchant things to say about the eternal battle of the sexes.

WE HAVEN'T heard an audience howl so uninhibitedly in many a semester as did that in Henry Miller's Theatre last evening. The first act left a lot of first-nighters really limp from laughing. We couldn't see how Chodorov was going to top or equal it for yaks in the second canto. But he came through with flying colors.

"Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" has to do with a psychoanalyst who accidentally learns about his fiancee's past through a patient. This patient, as played by Larry Blyden, is hilariously slap-happy. When it seems that he has wrung about all the laughs one could reasonably expect in one night, on bounces Anne Jackson, as the frustrated wife of a movie star, to wring twice as many with a madcap monologue lasting twice as long.

After the initial intermission, up pops Gig Young, as the movie star, to make the customers roar with his tipsy re-telling of the plot of Ibsen's "A Doll's House." Believing that his wife had walked out on him because of the analyst's advice, he is bent on revenge. He wants to see whether his adversary can take it as well as dish it out.

INSTEAD, he finds that the mental wizard is as baffled by his fiancee's actions as he is by his wife's. That's when he demands to know, as thespian and husband, what the heck Ibsen's Nora expected to find outside her doll's house. It's imaginative, delicious spoofing!

Franchot Tone, as the orderly psychiatrist almost driven insane by his girl's erratic behavior, is a super-foil for the zanies around him. He sets up the laughs beautifully, with skillful timing and miming.

Betsy von Furstenberg is perfect as the dizzy fiancee who considers herself perfectly normal. Henry Sharp is excellent as a wise and understanding mentor.

• • •

BENEATH THE hi-jinks, Chodorov suggests that life's problems cannot always be solved in what appears to be a rational manner, for irrationality is often the essence of rationality; that men and women can never agree on what they want, for they want such different things.

But don't go looking for messages when you visit Henry Miller's Theatre. Just have a whacking good time.

Cheryl Crawford merits a medal for bringing "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" to town, for commissioning attractive sets by William and Jean Eckart and smart costumes by Paul du Pont. And a bow from the waist is due the slick direction by author Chodorov.

If you're looking for laughs, you'll find them in abundance in West 43rd Street. Thanks to Tone, Blyden, Young and the Misses Von Furstenberg and Jackson, Chodorov's comedy is a hurricane of merriment. A gay and giddy carnival!

"OH, MEN! OH, WOMEN!"

Comedy by Edward Chodorov; staged by the author; settings by William and Jean Eckart; costumes supervised by Paul du Pont; presented by Cheryl Crawford in association with Anderson Lawler at Henry Miller's Theatre, December 17, 1953. The cast:

Miss Tacher.....Joan Gray
Alan Coles.....Franchot Tone
Grant Cobbler....Larry Blyden
Myra Hagerman.....Betsy von Furstenberg
Dr. Krauss.....Henry Sharp
Mildred Turner...Anne Jackson
Arthur Turner.....Gig Young
Steward.....Paul Andor

New York Herald Tribune

December 18, 1953

THEATER

'Oh, Men! Oh, Women!'

By WALTER F. KERR

Pre-Christmas Present

EARLIER this week Broadway was busy trying to prove that the Russians are human. Now it is trying to do the same thing for psychiatrists. First thing you know we'll all be just people.

"I don't need a psychoanalyst, I need help!" moans an overwrought young man, wringing his hat, to a sedate practitioner in the Henry Miller's new comedy. By the time author Edward Chodorov has put in two hours charting the irrational love lives of some blissfully erratic patients, it is the psychoanalyst who needs help. Along the way we have been treated to five or six of the funniest scenes of the season.

• • •

"Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" starts out mildly, even unpromisingly. For awhile it seems to have nothing more in mind than the amiable, but routine, complications of standard farce. Franchot Tone is seen as a fashionable analyst who is tidying up his practice before taking off on a summer-long honeymoon. The last visitor to darken his couch is a chap who is frantically biting his thumb over the memory of a passionate affair, an affair with a particularly maddening young woman. The switch is, of course, that the girl in question is the girl Mr. Tone expects to wed on the morrow.

• • •

The expected jealousies, accusations and assorted rages do pile up. Girl, boy and psychiatrist tangle vehemently in the young lady's apartment, and a couple of other maladjusted lovers are tossed into the battle for good farce measure.

But Mr. Chodorov is happily ahead of us practically all of the way. Not that he doesn't work the obvious shenanigans for all they're worth. He does, with a fine, drunken frenzy. But he's also added something—a relish for zany character, partly off-center and partly shrewdly observant. Each of his exasperated misfits is, in one way or another, endowed with wittily accurate life.

• • •

There is, for instance, the blonde little chipmunk who was given her share of men the intellectual jitters and who is now reducing her beloved doctor to a staggering shambles. This menace is played by Betsy von Furstenberg, who is an extraordinarily skilled comedienne for her age and weight. Miss von Furstenberg is very patient with a line. As a lass who has a very peculiar relation with reality (she dismisses it), she must engage in endlessly idiotic conversations with herself, repeating every third word four times, and throwing her hands to her face in horror whenever her intellectual quotient is questioned. The actress bides her time, lavishes great intensity on every bromide, and unerringly picks the precisely right moment to explode an entire passage into laughter.

Beside her, and keeping joyful pace with her, are Larry Blyden and Gig Young. Mr. Blyden is the boy who has lost her love, and he stammers, rebels, and finally succumbs to the minis trations of modern medicine with a jaunty pugnacity that is hilarious.

Mr. Young plays an interloper in the scrambled romancing, an actor whose wife has given him considerable trouble after each visit to Dr. Tone. As he tries to get a manly grip on himself through a haze of rye-on-the-rocks, he is vastly amusing; and he makes a robust comic climax out of a one-man performance of Ibsen's "A Doll's House."

The credits are not over. If there is a real tour-de-force in the course of the evening, it comes from Anne Jackson as the actor's lachrymose spouse. Miss Jackson plays one long, and entirely hilarious, stretch while reclining on that office couch; she makes an almost equally devastating sequence out of a passage in which she mournfully imagines life going on after her sad and untimely death.

• • •

Through all of this Franchot Tone suffers splendidly. It is the actor's principal duty to serve as foil, sitting confidentially by while the rockets pop around him, occasionally providing Kleenex for the emotionally disabled. This he does with finesse, sly humor, and splendid authority. Even when he turns human, tears his tie loose, and joins in the fray, he remains a rock among the gleefully shipwrecked.

"Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" is a dandy show.

DAILY NEWS

December 18, 1953

'Oh, Men! Oh, Women!' a Delightful Comedy and a Delightful Company

By JOHN CHAPMAN

With the holidays coming on, it's about time somebody got merry around here—and somebody did, last evening, at Henry Miller's Theatre. Several somebodies, in fact, all of whom are involved in a comedy called "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" This notice about this play should be the cheerfulest item in this issue of this newspaper, including the Daily Horoscope.

At Henry Miller's Theatre producer Cheryl Crawford has assembled a small and select group of comedians to act a piece by Edward Chodorov, and she has been inspired to permit Chodorov to direct his own work. The result achieved is witty, intelligent, satirical and just plain downright funny.

"Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" (and drat that title, with all the punctuation it involves) is about psychoanalysis. Cutting through all the fancy wordage and coming down to cases, Chodorov says that psychoanalysis is merely an attempt to give proper direction to people's sex urges. He says, further, that men and women will never, but never, get along together, because they want different things. Men want women and women want men. Hence all the fuss.

Physician, Heal Thyself.

A psychoanalyst is merely somebody who tries to put himself in the middle. In this case, the doctor is Franchot Tone, an orderly practitioner with a handsome consulting-room, a pocket watch, a comfortable confessional bier and a handy box of Kleenex for clients who are impelled to weep as they begin to Tell All. But poor Tone, skilled though he is at allaying the griefs and upsets of others, comes upon the appalling discovery that he is just as nutty as anybody else. His sex urge has directed him to fall in love with a girl who is a perfectly normal screwball, and she upsets him.

All of this is happy, hilarious and human. Tone is a masterly comedian as he tries desperately to live up to the hypothetic oath or whatever it is that a mind doctor swears to. Betsy von Furstenberg is a delight, visually and as an actress, as a girl who has no complexes but plenty of urges.

More Good Actors.

And these two are not necessarily the top of the cast. Among the patients who take their uneasy repose on Dr. Tone's couch is Anne Jackson, whose account of a quarrel with her husband is immensely funny. Another thoroughly delightful patient is Larry Blyden, who tells good old Dr. Tone that he is through with a girl forever, if he can only get her out of his mind. (The girl happens to be Miss von Furstenberg, which is a very cute trick on the part of the playwright.)

Still another excellent comedian is Gig Young, Miss Jackson's husband. Young, though he plays a highly paid actor, prefers to consult the poor man's psychoanalyst, the whisky bottle. His portrayal of a husband who is nice, lonesome and stewed is very, very good, and his alcoholic summation of Ibsen's "A Doll's House" is inspired drama criticism.

All the way through, "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" is done in expert fashion. There are three very good settings—an office, an apartment and a suite on an ocean liner—by William and Jean Eckart, and Chodorov's direction of the whole business is perfect.

Journal American

December 18, 1953

Whimsical Comedy

Tangled Loves Lead To Plenty of Laughs

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE ARE many condescending things to be said about "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" the new Edward Chodorov comedy that opened at Henry Miller's Theatre last night with Franchot Tone in the lead.

It could be said (and probably will be) that many situations are telegraphed, that corn and platitudes are occasionally abundant, that the first act lacks distinction and the ending is unfulfilled. But no honest reporter can say you won't laugh.

This whimsical consideration of the profession of psychiatry gets off to a rather feeble start with a new patient hitting the couch and confessing to an old affair with the girl the doctor is about to marry the next day.

You can see this one coming, and you're not too captured with the idea, but then a second patient, played by Anne Jackson, enters the premises and lifts everything high in the air with a wonderfully-well sustained description of why she had a catastrophic fight with her husband the night before.

From that point onward the audience is well in hand. It appears that this lady's husband also had the offer of the same girl's charms, and it is now up to the doctor to practice his mental medicine on himself: All this is really unimportant—or is it?

Many Laughs

This precipitates a good second act in the apartment of the doctor's fiancee, when all three men get together: the doc, his first patient (still torchy for the girl), the husband of the second patient (seeking vengeance for the advice the psychiatrist gave his wife) and, of course, the girl. The result is that the doctor blows his own lid.

The same little group re-convenes on the ship the next day, just before the engaged couple are about to sail, and even more serious complications ensue. I didn't think the solution was particularly valid, but it all serves as a pleasant structure for some engaging drolleries.

Though it all seemed to me that Mr. Tone, the doc, was given a bad shake in characterization—played too much for the "square" and required to spend long intervals registering thin-lipped inscrutability while everybody else was making with the jokes.

In fact, much of the whole evening is given over to interminable monologues, but it must be stated to the credit of Mr. Chodorov and the cast that one doesn't often mind.

There is, for example, a drunken soliloquy by Gig Young (the unhappy husband), which goes on and off for most of the second act and is never tedious. This is an auspicious first Broadway performance by another Hollywood fugitive.

Betsy von Furstenberg, as the girl in the doc's life, gives a consistently strong and humorous interpretation of a lissome and luxuriant lightweight, making almost plausible the point of why an eminent headshrinker would become ensnared with her in the first place.

Larry Blyden, a most authoratative young actor, delivers two strong scenes as the lad who is being driven to desperation by Miss von F's obvious attractions; laudable assists are credited to Henry Sharp and Joan Grey.

William and Jean Eckart have run up three excellent sets, especially the living room of Miss von Furstenberg's apartment in the second act, and Mr. Chodorov exhibited pleasant ingenuity in moving his own people through their paces.

It appears from here that the "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!" involved in this piece will be gainfully employed for a long spell.

"Oh, Men! Oh, Women!"—*continued*

The New York Times

December 18, 1953

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Psychoanalyst, cure thyself! is Edward Chodorov's theme in "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!", which was acted with considerable éclat at Henry Miller's last evening. Everybody in the audience seemed to be having a good time. For psychoanalysis is America's leading hobby, and everybody in the audience seemed to recognize and relish the clichés of the patients Mr. Chodorov exposes on the stage.

His satiric scheme is like this: A psychoanalyst who is about to be married hears some very alarming things about his fiancée from a new patient. She has had a lurid past. And among her other old friends is the husband of one of the analyst's women patients. In the second act Mr. Chodorov manages to get most of the whacks in one room at the same time, screaming at each other, punching each other and carrying on like highly literate lunatics. For two acts he belabors psychoanalysis with the slapstick. In the last act he reverts to common sense.

* * *

In the course of his low-comedy hubbub, Mr. Chodorov has written one fine remark. A distracted husband upbraids the perplexed analyst with the following basic solution: "I know why men and women can't get along together. Men and women want something completely different. The men want women and the women want men. That's why they can't get along together."

There is one occupational hazard in plays about psychoanalysis. The characters are boring. They are egotists. What they have to say is more fascinating to them than it is to the bystander. In the course of the evening Mr. Chodorov has debunked the Jovian calm and omniscience of his analyst amid the uproar of a busy farce. And in the last act he has something to say about the inadequacy of rationalism in two situations based on love. Mr. Chodorov is all for the blunt approach of the caveman when reason cracks, as it does sooner or later between courtier and maid.

But this department will have to dissociate itself from the audience response in one fundamental respect. It does not regard Mr. Chodorov's characters as hilarious. It regards them as variations on the familiar pain in the neck. No doubt analysts' fees are high because the patients are dull. Mr. Chodorov's vernacular is funny, and so is the satiric scheme of his play. But his characters are consistently depressing. They say what they think: that is the trying thing about them.

* * *

In case the characters bore you, too, you can find considerable consolation in the production and performance. Both are remarkably spirited. William and Joan Eckart have designed three brilliant sets that accent the modishness of the theme, and Mr. Chodorov has directed a highly articulate performance. In the central part of the analyst, Franchot Tone plays with some effort. The patients he receives in the first act seem to wear him down before he really gets going.

But Betsy von Furstenberg plays the analyst's fiancée with genuine subtlety and gaiety. And Gig Young gives an immensely amusing performance as the rebellious husband to a peevish wife; he has a number of comic inventions to keep the character alive. Anne Jackson, in the part of the peevish wife, gives an entertaining portrait of female squalor. Larry Blyden as a dangerous whack and Henry Sharp as a venerable teacher of psychoanalysis give good performances, also.

Throughout the first two acts, the audience was uproarious, and it seemed to be respectfully satisfied with Mr. Chodorov's personal analysis in the last act. This dissident department kept wishing that the characters could be madder in more original ways.

New York Post

December 18, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

The Sorrows of a Psychoanalyst

Unless the author of "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!"—a trying title, if ever I heard one—is deceiving us, psychoanalysts lead dull but disquieting lives. The central character of Edward Chodorov's new comedy, which opened last night at Henry Miller's Theater, is a member of that profession, and he seems to spend most of his time listening to long and tedious case histories from his garrulous patients. Since, in addition to their prolixity, these patients insist on telling him disagreeable things about his fiancee, his lot struck me as less than enviable.

In the middle act, doctor, patients, fiancee and an alcoholic actor move from the vicinity of his couch to the young lady's apartment, and matters improve considerably for the time being. Indeed, so long as the hard-drinking thespian, who blames the psychoanalyst for his wife's unhappiness, is nolding forth, the play has its amusing moments. But it soon gets back to its original doldrums, and it is my final impression that Mr. Chodorov's comedy, despite its entertaining interludes, provides an unexhilarating evening in the theater.

Theory and Practice

The point of the play seems to be that psychoanalysts, perhaps somewhat in the fashion of drama critics, are more expert in theory than in practice. Anyway, its hero is quite a success listening to his clients and telling them how they should conduct their sex lives. But when his young fiancee, whom he has foolishly regarded as an innocent and guileless child, turns out to have had a fairly extensive amorous past, he loses all of his fine scientific calm and makes rather a spectacle of himself. Presumably, he learns better in the end.

Although it has few other distinctions, Mr. Chodorov's comedy may conceivably be remembered for the number of its lengthy speeches. First, an earlier lover of the fiancee digs into his couch and talks interminably of his troubles. Then, the actor's wife, who is no girl to play second fiddle to any talker, tells of her own problems, and it takes her even longer to describe the trials of being married to a successful star. Finally, in the second act, the actor, himself, begins, and, although he is a bit funnier, he leaves few words unemployed.

Ibsen and Congreve

He is quite a cultured fellow, too, and he knows all about Ibsen, going in for a lengthy and fairly humorous excoriation of the mistaken philosophy of "A Doll's House." This, by the way, indicates a trend. The night before, two of the leading characters in "The Prescott Proposals" had quite a discussion of the works of Trollope. Now in the Chodorov play, there is not only the discussion of the errors of Ibsen, but, in addition, the psychoanalyst speaks knowingly of Congreve's "Way of the World." The theater, it seems, is growing erudite.

The comedy is agreeably acted. Franchot Tone has to do a lot of listening as the psychoanalyst, and he is forced to be pretty glum about it, but he manages the task pleasantly. Betsy von Furstenberg demonstrates again her engagingly humorous talent as the fiancee. Gig Young, of the movies, reveals skill as the actor, and Anne Jackson as his wife, Larry Blyden as the ex-lover, Henry Sharp as a veteran psychoanalyst, and Joan Gray as the hero's long-suffering secretary are excellent. But the play is only intermittently funny.

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

December 18, 1953

'Oh, Men!' Comes on the Scene

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Credit "Oh, Men! Oh, Women!," new comedy at Henry Miller's Theater with some of the season's loudest laughs. Mocking psychoanalysis, the play bounces its logic around and fools its audience, with the artificial dizziness of a trip through an amusement park.

Then it unfortunately sees fit to apologize for its flippancy. In the third act it tries to straighten out its people, it adds a point of view about the extent to which couchside annotators are effective.

Flavor of Fun.

I wish the expert cast would play this closing stanza as brightly as it does the earlier ones. The message is neither clear nor deep enough to warrant cutting the flavor of the fine fun that has gone before.

The gay unlikely plot relates the adventures of a mind doctor

these characters get together. The husband's play for the girl is interrupted when he sportingly referees differences between the doctor and the stubborn goon.

In the final act the married couple is more or less straightened out, the goon is reduced to natural size, and the doctor learns humility about his inhibitions and his profession.

Clinical in Form.

Most of this is hilarious in mood and clinical in form. The actors are bouncing their laughs off Franchot Tone, as the analyst, pretty continually. It is not until near the end that you appreciate on the day before his marriage. His last appointment turns out to be a wacky goon who tells in loving detail of his lengthy affair with the doctor's fiancee.

Burdened with this information, the doctor then listens to a wildly unhappy woman, she ends her account of marital difficulties by explaining how her husband means to revenge himself on the doctor. He intends making a play for this same fiancee.

Funny Start.

The two confessions set the play off to a funny start.

In the next act, naturally, all how much he does for the play. It is substantial and unpretentious, sincere acting, that really pays off when his fiancee achieves final heights of exasperation.

Betsy von Furstenberg is an instinctive young actress, cool but delicious looking. She behaves like all the spoiled young women in the world. She gives every promise of making the doctor's life a hell on wheels, until both are close to senility.

Rye Faces?

Gig Young makes a hilarious great deal out of his big scene. He is an actor quoting from Ibsen, slugging himself with rye, and vaguely trying to protect the surface of a lady's honor. It is fresh and delightful performing.

Anne Jackson does her best Broadway job as the confessing wife. Her endless speech in the first act is a triumph of vivid energy. She keeps the house squalling, while she lies flat on her back and talks to the ceiling.

Larry Blyden has the role of the punch drunk, ex-lover. With few redeeming characteristics to play, he makes the fellow sympathetic and howlingly funny.

"The Prescott Proposals"

Journal American

December 17, 1953

Another Hit For Hayward

By JOHN McCLAIN

LELAND HAYWARD'S latest device for the manufacture of money was presented by him at the Broadhurst Theatre last night; it is a large and ambitious vehicle called "The Prescott Proposals."

He has taken as little risk as it is possible to take in the theatre today (which is still plenty); the star is Katharine Cornell, the authors are Howard Linday and Russel Crouse, sets by Donald Oenslager, costumes by Mainbocher—and an immaculate supporting cast. Direction by Mr. Lindsay.

The opinion here is that he has another success going for him, but that it just manages to squeak through in spots. With all that formidable talent it could have been vastly improved.

The proceedings get off to an exciting start which sustains through the first act and one scene of act two. Then ennui raises its relentless head in the form of an interminable love scene.

Sleepy Time

Certainly much of it is vital to the plot, but when Miss Cornell and Lorne Greene, her leading man, finally get around to discussing their insomnia and go so far as to put a "sleep" record on the machine the drowsiness nearly transmits itself to the entire audience.

After that events come to life in the third act and the drama speeds to an exciting, if somewhat controversial finish.

The United Nations, in particular a committee dealing with international press regulations, is the background for the play.

Mrs. Prescott (Miss Cornell), the U. S. Delegate, is endeavoring to get ahead with her country's proposal to proceed informally with such items as are agreeable to all nations, mostly Russia, in the hope that with part of the agenda approved they can reach some round-table understanding of the more serious matters to follow.

Final Message

On the night of her big speech the delegate from Czechoslovakia, a long-forgotten lover, comes to her apartment unexpectedly, suffers a heart attack and dies. He is spirited out of the apartment by some friendly delegates, but the rumor gets around and there is hell to pay.

The international complications resulting take up most of the remaining time, except for the romantic interlude which threatened to bring everything to a dead stop.

The final message, enunciated by Miss Cornell, is that Russians are human after all; it may take a hundred years, but humanity will peacefully triumph over Communism. Well, I dunno—I sincerely hope she's right.

There seemed almost no doubt, however, that she gave an authoritative and distinguished performance. It seemed to me she was most convincing during her moments in the UN Building, holding her ground with the men on an official basis, less at ease in her apartment enacting the somewhat complex business of a lady diplomat in love.

Mr. Greene, playing a masculine and self-assured newscaster, seemed almost too much so; but Felix Aylmer turned in a magnificent interpretation of the Ambassador from the United Kingdom; Roger Dann was excellent as the French Delegate, as were Ben Astar, as the Russian, and Minoo Daver, as the Pakistanian, representatives.

There were skilful lesser contributions by Emily Lawrence, Helen Ray, Bartlett Robinson and Boris Tumarin.

"THE PRESCOTT PROPOSALS"

Play by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse; staged by Mr. Lindsay; settings by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Main Bocher; presented by Leland Hayward at the Broadhurst Theatre, December 16, 1953. The cast:

Mary Prescott..... Katharine Cornell
Kathleen Murray..... Emily Lawrence
Emma..... Helen Ray
Elliott Clark..... Lorne Greene
Jan Capek.... Bartlett Robinson
Sir Audley Marriott..... Felix Aylmer
Paul-Emile D'Arceau..... Roger Dann
Dr. Ali Masoud.... Minoo Daver
Alexis Petrovsky..... Ben Astar
Miguel Fernandez..... Edward Groag
Alan Draper.... Robert M. Culp
Miroslav Babicka..... Boris Tumarin
Russian Aide..... Jan De Ruth
British Aide..... J. P. Wilson
Precis-Writer..... John Drew Devereaux

Fine Settings

Mr. Oenslager provided a rich and tasteful apartment for Miss Cornell, an authentic committee room for the UN and two brilliant drops suggesting the extraordinary exterior of the UN Building.

Yes, Mr. Hayward has another hit, but he must have had a couple of nervous moments along the line.

The New York Times

December 17, 1953

Katharine Cornell Is Starred in 'The Prescott Proposals' by Lindsay and Crouse

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Thousands of people will be glad to know that at last Katharine Cornell has a splendid part, although no one needs to be told that she acts it well. She is cast as a United States representative to the U. N. in "The Prescott Proposals," written by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse and put on at the Broadhurst last evening.

Since a large part of the play is set in a U. N. committee room and involves U. N. procedure, "The Prescott Proposals" looks official. Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse, liberals and gentlemen, have found room here and there to say something heartening about the value of the U. N. to the world; and this column formally takes a position as close to their side as they are willing to permit.

But "The Prescott Proposals" is not so much a political play as an interesting melodrama set against the U. N. background. Mrs. Prescott, the United States representative, is presenting proposals that will put the emphasis more on the areas of agreement between the nations than upon their differences. Various delegates are hopeful that this may help to strengthen the morale of the world.

The play Mr. Lindsay and Mr. Crouse have written, however, revolves around the death of a Czechoslovak delegate. He is a former lover of Mrs. Prescott when her father was ambassador to that country. In the first scene of the play, when Mrs. Prescott is expecting some delegates to a cocktail party, he dies of a heart attack in her dressing room. To avoid a scandal that would wreck the Prescott proposals the delegates agree to move his body to the Czechoslovak hotel and report his death as having occurred there. The Russian, British, French, Pakistani and United States delegates solemnly swear never to divulge this secret.

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The play, therefore, does not get beyond the periphery of the U. N. But as a melodrama it is well planned, well staged and well acted. It does demonstrate in minor ways the differences between the Russian bloc and the Western democracies, with the Pakistani delegate looking much nobler than the others. Let this column express a certain measure of disappointment about the superficiality of the politics of "The Prescott Proposals." On its own terms as a melodrama, however, it is an exciting piece of work with a lot of suspense, several tense scenes, one big scene when the Russian delegate cracks and a happy conclusion.

Under Mr. Lindsay's direction the play has been brilliantly staged. Donald Oenslager has designed an apartment living room that is as mellow as fine old cognac, and also a United Nations committee room that is immaculately dramatic. Main Bocher has designed a series of gorgeous costumes, and Miss Cornell knows how to wear them.

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All the acting is admirable. As the representative of the United Kingdom, Felix Aylmer plays with an easy authority that ought to recommend him for high honors in the British Foreign Service. As the Soviet delegate, Ben Astar's rude, impassive attention to business is mighty effective and amusing, also. As the Pakistan delegate, Mino Davers' sympathy, quiet and unassumed grace ought to straighten out any political differences there may be between Broadway and his country at the moment. Obviously, Mr. Daver is the only pure soul among a roomful of rough or polished scroungers.

There are able performances also by Lorne Greene as a supernatural radio commentator who knows all, sees all and falls in love like other mortals; Roger Dann as an explosive Frenchman; Boris Tumarin as a Czechoslovak delegate, and Bartlett Robinson as the heart-sick Czech who does not quite last a full act.

But this is Miss Cornell's play. She gives a superb performance—warm, beautiful, lady-like, forceful and good-humored. Naturally, she has the personal magnificence that makes the big scenes vivid and that also endows the whole play with a quality of high-mindedness and sincerity. But she is excellent, also, in the routine scenes. Before the play is well-started, she manages the business telephone calls with casual authority; and in the committee meetings she plays the part of a delegate without stuffiness and without losing her humanity. Thank Santa Claus for having brought her a good part. It is just as good for the people out front.

From the intellectual point of view, "The Prescott Proposals" is less stimulating than the setting seems to promise. As theatre, however, it is an engrossing and entertaining piece of work, with some wholesome comments about the U. N. thrown in as garnishing.

DAILY NEWS

December 17, 1953

K. Cornell's 'Prescott Proposals' Looks & Sounds Important; Isn't

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In the long course of "The Prescott Proposals," which opened to a high-style audience at the Broadhurst Theatre last evening, a character makes an apology and an alibi by saying, "My emotions were being engaged." I wish mine had been, too, for this play is by Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse and their star is Katharine Cornell, and it would be gratifying at this moment to make a cheerful report on their theatrical venture.

But my emotions were not engaged, except for a very mild curiosity as to how so many good people of our moribund stage could become involved in so spiritless and footless a drama. Twice before, the authors have dealt successfully with affairs of national and international import—in an excellent play, "State of the Union," and in a popular musical spoof, "Call Me Madam." In their new piece they manage only to make the United Nations a great bore and Miss Cornell a defeated actress.

What's It About?

The title of the drama is the key to its failure to engage the emotions. The Prescott Proposals are something world-shaking which are about to be submitted to the United Nations by the delegate from the United States—Miss Cornell, who portrays a widow named Prescott. But bless me if I could ever figure out last evening what they were—and since I didn't know I couldn't care. Now and again I heard some nice speeches about freedom of the press and an eager statement by the leading lady that two hundred million Russians couldn't ALL be inhuman.

I sat through a couple of long and accurately detailed meetings of a UN subcommittee in a UN committee room. And still I couldn't figure out exactly what the Tophet the widow Prescott wanted from the other delegates representing the United Kingdom, Czechoslovakia, France, Pakistan and the U.S.S.R. Nor could I become emotionally aroused by the most antiseptic love affair since Pelleas went for Melisande, in which Lorne Greene, a radio world-thinker, becomes willing to eat Philadelphia scrapple in Miss Cornell's living room late of an evening.

Only Human After All.

However, I can brief you somewhat, if you have your brief case. The UN Czech delegate visits the U. S. delegate because he was her lover long ago, and he dies of a heart attack. This would look dirty if it got into the papers, so Britain, France, Pakistan and even Russia agree to carry the corpse out, put it into the Briton's Jaguar and pretend that it died there.

Switch now to the UN Building and the Prescott proposals. Here, everything is on the agenda but the corpse and the proposals. At the end the Russian (Ben Astar, who looks like John L. Lewis and acts as mean) threatens to blab about where the Czech checked out to the whole blooming General Assembly, but his heart softens at the last minute. This leads Mme. Cornell to exult that Russians may be human after all and that peace looms.

It's a good-looking production, with two sets by Donald Oenslager. The director, Howard Lindsay, keeps Miss Cornell loping around the stage like an ostrich. Felix Aylmer, as the Britisher, and Astar give the most interesting performances.

Daily Mirror

December 17, 1953

'The Prescott Proposals' Opens at Broadhurst

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse are idealists as well as playwrights. After witnessing "The Prescott Proposals" at the Broadhurst Theatre last evening, we are inclined to think them more effective when they leave their ideals at home and make dramaturgy paramount.

In this instance, they are affirming their faith in the United Nations. Unfortunately, their expression of approval is rather muddled and not entirely convincing. In fact, it leaves us with more doubt than we formerly had in the ultimate ability of this world body to solve international problems.

MARY PRESCOTT, U. S. delegate to the U. N., proposes a uniquely sane idea: her committee on freedom of the press will first take up matters in which its members are in accord, rather than at variance, and attempt to extend those areas of agreement.

Regrettably, she has a "past." While her late father, a distinguished diplomat was accredited in 1938 to Czechoslovakia, she had a youthful affair with a dubious member of that country's foreign office. On the eve of her momentous speech, up pops the thoughtless fellow to drop dead of a heart attack in her apartment.

Her committee colleagues, including the one from Russia, agree to hush up the scandal. But the double-crossing Russian goes back on his word. It looks bad for Mary until a radio commentator, who is fond of her and has quite a memory, recalls that the Soviet delegate had betrayed his own girl friend for placing romance above the party line.

SO, WHAT HAPPENS? When this scoundrel is on the point of revealing the truth about Mary, he is stricken with momentary qualms of conscience. He risks ruin rather than be a cad. He atones for his treachery by absolving our Mary. And this leads our Mary to think that other Russians will one day see the light, too.

It's a nice fairy story, but we don't believe a word of it. However, the Messrs. Lindsay and Crouse have convinced us that our Government should have even stricter security regulations, should learn more about the backgrounds of U.N. nominees before confirming their appointments. Mary Prescotts can be embarrassing, even ruinous for our side.

Leland Hayward has given "The Prescott Proposals" an excellent production. He has assembled an admirable cast, commissioned tasteful settings by Donald Oenslager, smart costumes by Mainbocher and persuaded co-author Lindsay to stage the errant fable for more than it's worth.

KATHARINE CORNELL eloquently pleads the cause of Mary Prescott and the larger cause of unity among nations. Felix Aylmer plays Great Britain's representative with suavity, sympathy and wry humor. Ben Astar is fascinating as the cantankerous Russian. Roger Dann is appropriately charming and excitable as the French delegate. And Minoo Daver is quite wonderful as a gentleman from Pakistan who conceals emotions beneath an inscrutable exterior.

And let's not forget Lorne Greene, as the realistic but understanding radio commentator.

"The Prescott Proposals" is a well-meaning but confused melodrama. In our opinion, it wastes the talents of some fine players, casts doubts on the efficacy of the U.N. and offers only a modicum of entertainment.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

December 17, 1953

THEATER

'The Prescott Proposals'

By WALTER F. KERR

Return of Cornell

GRAUSTARK is now officially a member of the United Nations. For our delectation, Howard Lindsay and Russell Crouse have whipped up a contemporary political play which is lovingly larded with old smoldering romances, secret visitations, sudden death, and many a handsome snapshot of Katharine Cornell standing beneath the candelabra, smoking a cigarette. (Gowns by Main Bocher.)

"The Prescott Proposals," which opened at the Broadhurst Wednesday, plays all of this fond and foolish romancing with a perfectly straight face. Mary Prescott is the daughter of an ambassador, the widow of a Senator, and herself U. N. delegate from the United States. She has organized a series of committees designed not to haggle over the unsettled problems of the world but to make the most of those "areas of agreement" which already exist.

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The harmony she envisions is seriously upset when a girlhood flame, now Czechoslovakian delegate to the same organization, visits her apartment to rekindle whatever is left of the embers and there disobligingly drops dead. The Russian representative is sure that the Czech was running out, and seeking sanctuary. He is also certain that the gentleman was poisoned. A radio commentator who is in love with Mary turns out to be the only man living who knows of her earlier trysts. Misunderstanding begets misunderstanding — on both the political and amorous level—and the amity of nations is threatened. The threat is resolved, I might add, when the ice-age Russian is reminded of a long since liquidated flame of his own, and turns, suddenly, happily human.

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The point, of course, is a valid one. (Tear off the Communist crust and you will find flesh and blood somewhere beneath.) To make their point, however, the irrepressible authors have plunged cheerfully into the grease-paint world of overheard telephone conversations, nervously drawn window curtains, and moderately rococo language ("Do the Russians know about us?"). Good will by the bucketful has been poured over the universe; but it is pretty clearly a universe designed by Donald Oenslager and brought to handsome fulfillment by Leland Hayward.

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Once you have granted the papier-mache plotting, though, "The Prescott Proposals" is left with a certain good-natured, old-world charm of its own. The aura of all those flashy old romances does cling to it, and the very schmaltz which robs it of pertinence gives it a kind of footlight gayety.

Much of this is due to the personal splendor which Miss Cornell lavishes on her earnest heroine. The actress is perfectly comfortable rolling out a line like "No one knew—we had to be sure no one knew," and as she warmly urges her optimism on her colleagues, or nervously fences with a man who wouldn't mind destroying her, she is brilliantly plausible.

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A stageful of excellent actors gives her rich and judicious support. Felix Aylmer exudes a wonderfully tired and gentlemanly tolerance as a British diplomat who doesn't believe in driving on one-way streets. Ben Astar sits like a stone man as the implacable Russian delegate and brings off the ticklish turnabout at the finish with remarkable conviction. Lorne Greene is straight-forward as a bulldog commentator, Minoo Daver is impenetrably suave as a gentleman from Pakistan, and Roger Dann, Boris Tumarin, and Emily Lawrence help enormously on the edges.

Mr. Lindsay has directed with meticulous care, piping an unexpected tension into two prolonged committee sessions, squeezing the most out of the play's tongue-in-cheek asides, and turning two or three elaborate pauses into revealing examinations of character.

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As serious drama, "The Prescott Proposals" is markedly lightweight. As straight theater, it is often good fun.

New York Post

December 17, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

A Play About the United Nations

Howard Lindsay and Russel Grouse are thoughtful and serious men, as well as experts in the craft of the drama. In "The Prescott Proposals," which opened last night at the Broadhurst Theater, they have combined their hopes and fears about the state of the world with their talent for showmanship in a play dealing with the United Nations in action, and because they have tossed into it their lively ideas on virtually everything, it tends to be more of an outline of their general viewpoint than a neatly organized stage work. But it has the notable virtue of possessing a sensitive contemporary intelligence.

It also has the virtue of offering Katharine Cornell in an ideal role. Miss Cornell, looking even handsomer and more distinguished than usual, is playing a hopefully idealistic member of the American delegation to the United Nations, who has presented a plan to explore the areas of agreement in a world of disagreement, and it is her belief that there must be a touch of humanity somewhere beneath the gruff and hostile Russian exterior. She not only looks the part to perfection, but manages it splendidly in one of the finest of her performances.

"The Prescott Proposals" deals with her adventures in both sex and politics, and, since the theater is generally supposed to be more comfortable with personal matters than with political preoccupations, you might think that the play would be more successful in its romantic concerns than in its contemplation of the diplomats at work. It doesn't turn out that way, however. The love affair, if you can call it that, between the lady delegate and a lofty radio commentator is stodgy and far from stimulating, but the scenes of international debate and manipulation are almost always interesting.

There is quite a bit of plot. It appears that Mary Prescott, who is the lady Miss Cornell plays, had once had a romantic affair with a young Czech, who is now a member of the puppet Czechoslovakian delegation to the United Nations. When he dies of a heart attack in her New York apartment, the Russian representative tries a bit of double-crossing of his American, British, French and Pakistanian colleagues. In the end, he is still conscienceless and cruel, but a deeply-hidden vein of decency is briefly revealed, and Mary Prescott is justified in her belief that there is hope for the world in that tiny spark.

If you can recall the anti-Nazi plays of the previous generation, you may remember that, in some ironic fashion, the Nazi villains had a way of turning out to be their most interesting characters. The same irony occurs in "The Prescott Proposals," which is certainly anti-Communist. The Russian representative is unquestionably a disagreeable fellow, but he is also the most entertaining figure in the narrative, and the play is at its best when he is in action. Ben Astar, who has the role, looks like Malenkov and plays the part with a spoiled-child air that is enormously effective.

There is an excellent performance by Felix Aylmer as the wise and humorous British delegate, and Minoo Daver is admirable as the man from Pakistan. I'm afraid that Lorne Greene is a little pompous as the commentator, but that may add to the realism of his characterization. The others are well cast, and Donald Oenslager's sets are particularly good. "The Prescott Proposals" discusses all sort of matters, including the works of Trollope, the "inscrutibility" of the East, the state of China and journalistic ethics, and its love story is rather a handicap. But it has the great merit of being concerned with a world in chaos.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 17, 1953

Proposals' Is Dignified Thriller

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A sophisticated melodrama took over the Broadhurst last night. "The Prescott Proposals" is a thriller. It is also dignified and absorbing, and has a good clear healthy point of view.

The drama stars Katharine Cornell. She has rarely in a modern play had such chance to employ her unique gifts for captivating your belief in bold situations. She is supported by a cast which is just about flawless.

Matter of Principle.

The curtain is barely up before we have Miss Cornell established as the U.S. member of an important United Nations committee engaged in considering proposals she has introduced. Before you can bat your eye, an old lover has appeared at her home, and dropped dead in her bedroom.

The man is a Czech diplomat, formerly a Nazi. Since Miss Cornell is deep in the defense of freedom of the press in her committee, she is faced with a principle brought very close to home. One of the four committee members who knows the truth anonymously phones the district attorney, and precipitates an autopsy.

Coincidental with this suspense is a parallel problem. She is captivated by a prominent radio commentator, whose whole philosophy is based on his belief that the Russians are dehumanized and cannot be negotiated with.

"The Prescott Proposals" have one great theme, the belief that all humanity can be appealed to. They suggest confining talk to "areas of agreement," where sound relations may be established for discussing later differences.

The play shows the heroine making deep and difficult decisions, which lead almost to the point of personal scandal and ruin. In the end it is the commentator who inadvertantly does the one thing which proves the lady's point, and saves her and her Proposals.

Radiant Star.

The star looks radiant in lovely clothes and plays with the warm majesty that always distinguishes her appearances. She can summon the mellow grandeur and intensity to convince you thoroughly in moments that would suit a Bernhardt's bravura style.

Lorne Green has refreshing directness as the commentator. His long and subtle love scene in Act 2 with the star is a rare example of actors holding an audience breathless by playing moods behind their words.

Felix Aylmer is the British member of the committee, wry and elegant. He never sheds that inestimable air of reliability, so much a part of the English diplomat's make up.

Ben Astar is excellent as the Russian. He somehow can suggest a temper on the edge of apoplexy without being hammy or comic. Roger Dann has great fire, elegance and gallantry as the French associate, and Minoo Daver offers just the proper tone of quiet aloofness for the member from Pakistan, who surprises everybody.

Some of Lindsay and Crouse's new play is constructed more like grand opera than the average show we know. It has bigness, daring, coincidence and neatness, providentially mixed. Its Oenslager settings are opulent and full of flair.

"The Prescott Proposals" makes the sort of evening where you gasp with suspense as a character moves toward a telltale door, or are carried away by a shamelessly heroic appeal for trust in the goodness of mankind.

"John Murray Anderson's Almanac"

Journal American

December 11, 1953

New Revue Drags

De Wolfe Shines— Music and Skits Dull

By JOHN McCLAIN

THERE is a great deal of good in John Murray Anderson's "Almanac," which came to the Imperial Theatre last night, but it is the regretful opinion of this customer that the good was outweighed by the dreary.

The production is handsomely mounted, there is plenty of pulchritude, an occasional bright vocal number, a few truly hilarious sketches, some notable dancing; but there are also sustained periods of lassitude.

Much as I hate the expression, I am obliged to call it mild entertainment.

Perhaps much of this opinion stems from the fact that I didn't think Hermione Gingold as good as she should have been. She can be good, which is established late in the proceedings with a sketch called "Dinner For One," but most of her earlier material was largely lacking.

She is not particularly well established in her opening number, "Queen For A Day," and she certainly doesn't attract many fans with her "Cello" bit.

This would seem to be the old losing battle of actress versus writer, for she gains stature through a single number called "Which Witch," tops it with the dinner scene and glides to a fair finish with "La Pistachio," just before closing.

One had the feeling that with a little more help she could have been triumphant.

On the somber side there is also the fact that the music is slightly less than sensational.

Credits are given to some eight various composers and lyricists, but I was strangely unaroused by a most pretentious number called "The Nightingale And The Rose" and the kind of small and undistinguished girl-and-boy interludes that go on while you hear them moving the heavy scenery behind the curtain.

Taking a brighter view, however, there are some exceedingly funny moments with Billy De Wolfe, a Hollywood fugitive, and Orson Bean, an amiable and engaging monologist.

Dance Number

There is a memorable dance number at the opening of the second act by Nanci Crompton, some capable singing by Polly Bergen, three big single specialties displaying the vocal talents of Harry Belafonte and the adroit complementary services of Celia Lipton, Elaine Dunn, Carleton Carpenter, Kay Medford, Harry Mimmo and James Jewell.

It also should be recorded that I was delighted by two sketches, "My Cousin Who?" and "Don Brown's Body," written by Jean Kerr, the wife of a fellow critic. (What does MY wife do all afternoon?)

The "Dinner for One" scene between Miss Gingold and Billy De Wolfe is certainly one of the most gleeful presented hereabouts in a long time, and everything is big and bright and beauteous, but "Almanac" contains many dull pages.

"JOHN MURRAY ANDERSON'S ALMANAC"

Revue with music and lyrics by Richard Adler, Jerry Ross, Cy Coleman, Michael Grace, Joseph McCarthy, Henry Sullivan, John Rox and Bart Howard; sketches by Jean Kerr, Sumner Locke Elliott, Arthur Macrae, Herbert Farjeon and Lauri Wylie; sketches staged by Cyril Ritchard; dances by Donald Saddler; scenery by Raoul Pene du Bois; costumes by Thomas Becher; entire production devised and staged by John Murray Anderson; presented by Michael Grace, Stanley Gilkey and Harry Rigby at the Imperial Theatre, December 10, 1953, with the following cast: Hermione Gingold, Billy De Wolfe, Harry Belafonte, Polly Bergen, Orson Bean, Nanci Crompton, Carleton Carpenter, Harry Mimmo, Elaine Dunn, Celia Lipton, James Jewell and others.

New York Post

December 11, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

John Murray Anderson's New Revue

Being a veteran of the musical theater, John Murray Anderson is naturally given to nostalgia, that amiable vice of theatrical veterans, and his new revue, which he outspokenly calls "John Murray Anderson's Almanac," has a reminiscent ring to it. At the Imperial, where it opened last night, it seemed unashamedly old-fashioned in mood, spirit and, particularly, music. There is a lot that is pleasant about it, in both material and cast, and I certainly don't hold its adherence to a familiar pattern against it, but I found it better in its parts than as a whole.

Since these parts, however, are commendable, I think it is only fair that I should speak of them first. To begin with, it is good-looking, with attractive sets by Raoul Pene du Bois, handsomely Ziegfeldian costumes by Thomas Becher, and some agreeably pictorial show girls. Then, too, it has a certain style about it, and, even though the style is sometimes just a little lacking in vigor and excitement, this is always a commendable quality to find in the theater these days. Next, there are several sketches that add to the evening's gaiety.

Dinner Scene

There is, for example, a very English comedy number by Lauri Wylie, in which the British comedienne, Hermione Gingold, who is making her American debut in Mr. Anderson's revue, appears as a lonely dowager and Billy De Wolfe is her faithful retainer. The ancient lady is having a ceremonial dinner, with vacant chairs for her departed admirers, and she wants to drink the proper toasts with all of them. The fortunate butler has to respond for the missing guests, and it means quite a lot of drinking for him. I thought the result was quite remarkably funny.

Then, there is a sketch by Jean Kerr, in which one of those sex-and-sadism detective stories of Mickey Spillane is presented in the manner of "John Brown's Body." It is rather a difficult comic feat to pull off, but it works out extremely well. There is humor, too, in an episode wherein two dignified British matrons, one of whom is Miss Gingold and the other, if you will accept my word for it, Mr. De Wolfe, meet in a railroad carriage. And Orson Bean, a young comic of imagination, freshness and talent, has a good monologue about a Chinese having an American meal and indulging in the cliches of an Occidental patronizing Oriental cooking.

Some Complaints

Considering all of these virtues, you might begin to wonder why I started out to be so captious about Mr. Anderson's "Almanac." Well, for one thing, the music seemed to me curiously commonplace. For another, the dancing isn't very interesting, and there is a characteristic number called "The Nightingale and the Rose," based on an Oscar Wilde sentimental fable, that struck me as more embarrassing than touching. There is also something about Harlequin, Pierrot, Columbine and the rest of them, which I thought was fairly painful.

Miss Gingold is a veteran character comedienne of skill and individuality, but only in the two numbers I have mentioned does she emerge as effectively as she deserves to. Mr. De Wolfe is at his best as the drinking butler and as a parody of Ralph Meeker in an otherwise ineffectual attempt to show "Little Women" combined with "Picnic" and "Wish You Were Here." The humorous imagination of Mr. Bean, the good looks of Polly Bergen, and the soubrette attractiveness of Elaine Dunn are of much help. But the show is very in-and-out entertainment.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 11, 1953

Hermione Gingold In Broadway Debut

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The case of Hermione Gingold has at long last been presented to Broadway. The British comedienne made her local debut last night in "John Murray Anderson's Almanac" at the Imperial.

She has become so well known for being on the verge of Times Square appearances, that the audience gave her an ovation before she opened her mouth. By the end of the evening, all agreed that she is one of the funniest women in the world.

The new revue also introduces to the theater by way of night clubs and pictures, Billy De Wolfe, who is a greater comic than ever.

Loaded With Talent.

The big supporting cast is studded with potential stars. This gang is loaded with talent, and youthful, as fresh as paint. The production twinkles and softly glows, as an Anderson show somehow always does. The dancers are sharp, the singers are bright. But where the "Almanac" rides highest is in laughter.

Miss Gingold as an intoxicating Victorian temptress is outrageously, uniquely funny. She is bitter but winning as a couple of ancient dames, and impertinently hilarious as a cellist. It is a wild, incisive, decapitating sense of humor, combined with a Miss America figure, and an elfin face like a lady jack-o'-lantern. Her humor is served like droplets of hydrochloric acid, and her air is of villainous innocence.

Mr. De Wolfe once did a whole night club revue, solo. From that turn, he retains some brilliantly amusing bodily tricks. As the hero of a musical parody of "Picnic," he walks like the ham Casanova of all time. His octogenarian butler makes a novelty, believe it or not, of getting good and soused.

Youthful Freshness.

The "Picnic," "Wish You Were Here" satire is pitiless and bold. The company's youthful freshness makes it startling fun. And the same quality makes the Harlequin and Nightingale ballets seem anything but old hat.

Harry Belafonte makes an auspicious Broadway step from clubs. A singer with a fluid body, he is best singing his own "Mark Twain." Polly Bergen, by way of films and TV, steps out as a femme fatale with a voice at once tortured and soothing. Orson Bean brings down the house with his twist on ordering in a Chinese restaurant.

Carleton Carpenter and Elaine Dunn dance and sing with a wealth of bobby sox energy. They convince you that "Good News" is back. Nanci Crompton can pirouette for days on her toes, but does it exquisitely, never as a chore.

A Touch of Astaire.

Harry Mimmo, pint madman, catches an odd essence of the great Astaire dancing. Celia Lipton fronts production numbers with smooth singing, and James Jewell is her handsome counterpart on the male vocals.

Songs are not often plugged in the "Almanac." "Love Is a Wanderer," "Earth and the Sky" and "I Dare to Dream" will surely be heard.

Like most new musicals, "Almanac" seems overloaded. I would never miss "Tinpan Alley," or "Hold 'Em Joe." But as Miss Gingold so riotously remarks, we all have our faults. And Kay Medford imitating Judith Anderson in "Don Brown's Body" is worth them both.

It's a merry-go-round, lively, sparkling and wittily diverting, much more often than not.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

December 11, 1953

THEATER

'Almanac'

By WALTER F. KERR

EVERYBODY knows that you can find the darndest things in an almanac, and you do in John Murray Anderson's. In the pretty-pretty new revue which opened at the Imperial last night, you'll find a luscious line of showgirls done out in bridal gowns, the while a sleek blonde lovely sings a song called "If Every Month Were June." You'll find a boy-girl team doing college cut-ups to a tune labeled "You're So Much a Part of Me." You'll discover—and in this case wish you hadn't—a tenor wishing some one would bring him a red, red rose, and a fleeting nightingale who manages to provide him with one by stabbing herself with a thorn. You will also find a couple of sketches by my wife.

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Not that all of this old-fashioned nonsense is entirely painful. I suppose it doesn't hurt to have a trace of Ziegfeld slipping in from the wings, or even a dash of barefaced Paramount-Publix. It's just surprising coming from John Murray Anderson, that's all. Mr. Anderson has been pacing, pointing and polishing other people's revues for a good many years. His trademark—except when he was drilling elephants for Barnum & Bailey—has always been a slick, smart simplicity. Now that he's been given his own show to ringmaster, he betrays a marked affection for limpid corn, and I didn't know he had it in him.

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The best of this gingerbread harlequinade does have that air of simplicity. Raoul Pene du Bois has fashioned portals of black-and-grey diamonds, and the scenic variations which are dropped between them—a handsome doorway, a gilded picture-frame, a stylized New England landscape—are attractively modest. Harry Belafonte sings one memorable chant ("Mark Twain") against a blacked-out stage, another before a wonderful woodcut, stark and striking.

There is also an endearing modesty—a shyness, practically—about the principal performers. "Shyness" isn't exactly a word I ever expected to use about Hermione Gingold, who is a roughhouse Briton with a brassy show-voice, a spittingly precise delivery and an endless assortment of rubbery faces. But Miss Gingold seems not so much determined to slaughter us as honestly charmed to be permitted to perform, and she is very funny as she creaks down the stairway of an ancient mansion, as she laments what a cello has done to her legs, as she recounts an unlikely casting session with Jose Ferrer.

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Billy de Wolfe is ingratiating, too, in his first main-stem appearance. Mr. de Wolfe is essentially a mimic, not especially successful when he is tangling with verbal humor, but uproariously antic when he is writhing his way across the stage under an old garbage can during a parody of "Picnic," or when he is drunkenly hurtling china in the show's best sketch, Lauri Wylie's "Dinner for One."

The demure quality which unites the players virtually reaches self-effacement with Orson Bean, a timid entertainer who gapes awestruck at the audience, twitches his collar, and blinks his eyes in bland confusion. I especially liked Mr. Bean's cheerful, whistling salute to contemporary disaster ("They're rioting in Africa") and his management of a Drama Quartette version of the Mickey Spillane stories, written by that Jean Kerr who is not related to Deborah Kerr or John Kerr.

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Carleton Carpenter bounces brightly about as a youthful master of ceremonies, Polly Bergen is extremely pretty as she struggles with songs of no noticeable merit, Celia Lipton is extraordinarily handsome as she flatly gives up the struggle, and Nanci Crompton is a spectacularly fetching dancer. The Donald Saddler choreography, though, is generally as undistinguished as the variously composed songs—and the musical interludes which very often make a revue are, the "Almanac's" least invigorating pages.

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I suppose there's no worse thing to say about a show than that it is passable entertainment. But John Murray Anderson's elaborate notebook seems to me just that—pleasant, placid and surprisingly reminiscent of the wonders of Radio City Music Hall.

The New York Times

December 11, 1953

John Murray Anderson Brings Hermione Gingold and an 'Almanac' to Town

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Since John Murray Anderson is the king of revues, it is practically inevitable that his "Almanac" should turn out to be a bright and brilliant show. With an excellent cast that includes Hermione Gingold, it opened at the Imperial last evening to an audience that could enjoy the scenery but also laugh at the jokes.

For this is a funny harlequinade in which the humor is almost continuous and always light and mocking. Miss Gingold, who is one of the idols of London, is a blowzy beauty who looks like a drawing from Punch and gives herself artistic airs that are grotesquely hilarious. Billy de Wolfe, an American clown, does not look much better, to tell the truth, but he is also immensely entertaining. Your attention is respectfully directed to a sketch entitled "Dinner for One," which Miss Gingold and Mr. de Wolfe act like a couple of geniuses. It seems like a long time since anyone acted a revue sketch with so much craft and subtlety.

* * *

Something must be put here also in praise of Orson Bean (or so it says in the program) who is a kind of Yankee Herb Shriner with some double-edged comic sketches. That is to say, they are funny in themselves, but they also poke fun at New England characteristics. Mr. Bean (is that his real name?) looks a little like a Harvard junior, which is perfectly all right, of course, but does not promise much in the way of entertainment. Nothing could be more deceptive. For Mr. Bean is a wit with some dry material that is concise and convulsing.

As a showman, Mr. Anderson's taste is always unexceptionable. This "Almanac" is mighty fine to look at. Raoul Pène du Bois, the scene painter, has given it a background of stark grandeur as well as some gorgeous foregrounds; and Thomas Becher has dressed the actors in carnival costumes that look gay.

Inside this elegant milieu Mr. Anderson has arranged one or two formal production numbers that pleasure-seekers do not have to look at if they don't want to. But he has also found room for some amiable dancing and one especially vertiginous whirl by Nanci Crompton. Let's give him a vote of thanks for presenting Harry Belafonte with respect. Mr. Belafonte sings several numbers with an impassive sincerity that is stirring. One of them, a river ballad called "Mark Twain," is a masterpiece; and Mr. Belafonte's expository style as singer and actor makes it the "Almanac's" high point in theatrical artistry.

The music and lyrics that Richard Adler and Jerry Ross have contributed are routine show material. The "Almanac" is more distinguished for its humor. Jean Kerr, a pretty breezy dame with the slapstick, has written a gruesome jest about horror literature, "My Cousin Who?", which Mr. De Wolfe acts with gusto. She has also caricatured the form of dramatic readings in "Don Brown's Body" by applying the culture of Mickey Spillane to the style of the recent Benét chronicle. Mrs. Kerr's satirical attitudes give the "Almanac" the true flavor of a stage revue.

Everyone has conspired to keep all the pages of the "Almanac" pithy. Cyril Ritchard has directed the sketches skillfully, Donald Saddler has staged the dances and musical numbers with sleek grace. Although the "Almanac" is modishly luxurious, it does not waste riches on idle display. As a rule, beautiful shows are not funny. But this one is. For it has a mind of its own. The mind is sharp and sardonic.

Daily Mirror

December 11, 1953

'Anderson's Almanac' Is Glittering, Tuneful

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Michael Grace, Stanley Gilkey and Harry Rigby must have spent a sizable fortune on "John Murray Anderson's Almanac," which arrived at the Imperial Theatre last evening, for it is a stunningly beautiful show. And it is often a gay and funny one. We liked it particularly when Hermione Gingold, a welcome visitor from England, and Billy De Wolfe held the stage.

WE HAVE BEEN hearing much of Miss Gingold's talents from those who have seen her in London, and they did not overestimate her abilities. As for De Wolfe, we've known how amusing he can be, via his nitery and film appearances. They rocked the house as a pair of British biddies getting chummy over a container of port, and as a doddering dowager and her obliging butler celebrating an anniversary.

Two of the cleverest skits in the show are by Jean Kerr: "My Cousin Who?," a spoof on horror stories, and "Don Brown's Body," a satire on the concert version of the Benet poem, as Mickey Spillane might write it. De Wolfe and Celia Lipton were excellent in the former, while Orson Bean, Kay Medford and Carleton Carpenter skilfully captured the laughs of the latter.

Bean, droll monologist as well as actor, had the first-nighters howling with a macabre little number, set to music, called "Merry Little Minuet." It might well have been titled, "Chuckle While You Can, for Aren't We All Going to the Dogs?" And Miss Gingold sassed the Bard with her hilarious "Which Witch?"

* * *

NANCI CROMPTON drew robust and spontaneous applause with her whirlwind stepping. She gave an amazing demonstration of most of the difficult turns from the book of ballet. Harry Belafonte scored with three arresting folk songs. Polly Bergen proved a pretty singer. Harry Mimmo, Italian clown, gave impersonations of several reigning stars. And a salute is due the dancing and singing of the sprightly little Elaine Dunn.

Anderson, who assembled the "Almanac" is a master of the revue form. Some of his innovations in hits of the past made theatrical history. He is a man of taste and a first-rate showman. When he does a musical, you can bank on it that his associates will be peers in their respective fields.

Raoul Pene du Bois has designed a breathtakingly smart production, and Thomas Becher lovely costumes. They forecast the splendors to come with their delightful opening, "Harlequinade." Cyril Ritchard has staged the sketches with his usual suavity, while Donald Saddler, Ballet Theatre alumnus, has contributed most effective choreography.

THOUGH Anderson has emphasized the chic, he has not neglected beauty. There are bevies of girls who should prove tonics for the eyes of tired business men. There are other delights, but an onrushing deadline prevents our heralding them now.

It is good to have a glittering, sophisticated, tuneful revue on Broadway again. We had about come to the conclusion that this entertainment form had become a vanishing art until Anderson gave us his dazzling "Almanac." The audience enjoyed it as much as we did. The laughter was lusty and the applause deafening. They spelled "solid click." Take our tip: tickets for it are going to be scarce. You'd better get yours immediately.

DAILY NEWS

December 11, 1953

'Almanac' Predicts Fair Weather

By JOHN CHAPMAN

I can't think of a better theatre for a pleasant evening than the Imperial, since John Murray Anderson's "Almanac" has opened there. Old Farmer Anderson, who has been putting out "Almanacs" under various forms since the Greenwich Village "Follies" of 1919, brought a funny and handsome revue to the big playhouse last night. To me, John Murray is the best revue director in the business because he keeps his shows moving, and this time he has had invaluable assistance from Cyril Ritchard, as director of sketches, and from Buster Davis, a young musical director wearing sun glasses who has a fine instinct for pacing a performance.

The star of "Almanac" is Hermione Gingold, the English comedienne who has been trying to get here for years. I'm glad she made it, for her comedy is as broad as she is, and it is a great pleasure to witness her monologue about the lady cellist who has grown to fit her cello even when standing. It is an even greater pleasure to see her and Billy De Wolfe in a sketch called "Dinner for One," in which Miss Gingold, as a very old grande dame, is served a stately dinner by her butler, Mr. De Wolfe—vin compris.

Light as a Feather.

Revues have been risky ventures since the days when J. M. Anderson put on the show at the Music Box in 1924. Now and again we have had some successful ones, but

"John Murray Anderson's Almanac"—*continued*

our musicals today are mostly heavy "book" shows. "Almanac" is light of heart, light of foot, smartly designed and costumed and staffed with some very engaging entertainers. It also has a number of pleasant sketches.

Best of the sketches is one called "Don Brown's Body," by Jean Kerr, wife of Walter F. Kerr, drama critic of the Herald Tribune. Since Mr. Kerr might be a little bashful about praising his spouse in his own paper, I offer her some praise for her scrapbook in my own little publication. Mrs. Kerr's sketch is what a revue sketch should be—funny, ridiculous and observant. It is a Mickey Spillane thriller told in the manner of "John Brown's Body," with all the folderol about the actors pretending to read and a chorus putting in side remarks. This number leads me to believe that Mrs. Kerr may be as good a drama critic as her old man is.

Lauri Wylie's "Dinner for One," already mentioned, is another admirable sketch, and a third is a first-class satire on "Picnic" by Sumner Locke-Elliot, titled "Hope You Come Back." Billy De Wolfe is skillfully funny in this one as the sexy muscle-boy.

Other Good Things.

Besides sketches, a good revue should have some nice songs, pretty girls and pleasant specialties—and "Almanac" has these. Harry Mimmo, a burlesquer new to me, has a delightful takeoff on a Fred Astaire movie dance. Polly Bergen is a very attractive singer with an interesting way of singing, and Harry Bellafonte is another out-of-the-ordinary singer. And Nanci Compton is the spinningest and cutest dancer since Gloria Gilbert was a girl. Orson Bean, a monologist, fills a couple of stage waits agreeably.

Scenery for a revue should be just right—handsome but not overpowering; and I'd say that Raoul Pene Du Bois' sets couldn't be bettered for good looks, style and workability necessary for a fast-paced revue. Old Farmer Anderson's "Almanac" should last through Winter and Spring, at least.

"Richard III"

The New York Times

December 10, 1953

Ferrer Is Starred in Margaret Webster's Staging of Bard's 'Richard III' at City Center

By BROOKS ATKINSON

José Ferrer's acting in "Richard III" does not equal his acting in "Cyrano de Bergerac" and "The Shrike." Since those productions came out of his repertory, they had only to be renewed for the City Center series. Excepting a Canadian performance in 1946, his version of Richard the Crookback is a fresh creation in Margaret Webster's staging of Shakespeare's violent drama.

To judge by the Tuesday evening preview, to which the critics were invited, Mr. Ferrer does not have the force, eloquence or stature for heroic acting in a poetic play.

In view of the conditions under which he and his colleagues appear at the City Center, an uneven production is almost inevitable. "Richard III" is a complicated, disorderly, formidable play. If it were to be put on for a regular Broadway engagement, it would need a full schedule of rehearsals and a trial-and-error journey on the road.

To open in it cold, on the heels of two previous productions, is to defy the fates as recklessly as Richard does in the play. Not that Mr. Ferrer ever flinches from the impossible. He dotes on the impossible and usually demolishes it with honor.

* * *

And say this much for the Center's "Richard III": it is all there—no mean achievement. The malign and bloody chronicle of the evil genius of the House of York sweeps relentlessly across the stage, with Mr. Ferrer, steeped in treachery, at the head of the death march.

Always a lucid director, Miss Webster has arranged the sprawling play intelligibly. You see Richard worming his way to a position of power, more audacious as each maneuver succeeds, until he is sitting on the throne—a deformed, insidious monarch who rids the world of rivals with the connivance of assassins. It is a frightful story as Shakespeare first put it together. Mr. Ferrer and Miss Webster have got it on the stage inside an excellent suit of scenery from Richard Whorf's brooding designs.

The concluding battle scene, always a difficult one for modern stages, is well directed and acted. The coronation scene is at once spectacular and ominous. As the widow of Edward III, Jessie Royce Landis presides ably over one portentous scene; Florence Reed, as an ancient queen with bitter memories, lays her curse on Richard in a blasting voice that awakens both the fates and the audience, and Margaret Wycherly, as Richard's mother, has a good scene in the second act.

There are other perceptive episodes—Kendall Clark, as Tyrell, shuddering over the slaughter of the young princes; Jack Bittner recoiling from the murder of Clarence; Maureen Stapleton, as Anne, lamenting the murder of her husband in one of the early scenes; William Post Jr., as Hastings, facing his executioners nobly; Staats Cotsworth, as Clarence, accepting imprisonment in the Tower like a gentleman.

But the pace at which work has to be done at the City Center precludes any development of a dominant style among actors assembled for one production. There is, alas, very little resonance in the speaking of the lines. You would hardly recognize them as theatrical poetry full of sound, fire and imagery.

As Buckingham, Vincent Price gives a weak performance in a style that is almost conversational. And Douglas Watson, as Richmond, throws most of his lines away.

Mr. Ferrer rarely lifts his dialogue above commonplace levels. Probably, for the most obvious reasons, his voice is tired. Nor does he penetrate far under the surface of the character.

For Richard is not an ordinary schemer, but a man of intellect and irony; he has a diabolical brilliance that carries him through several incredible crises. Until the last scene he is the complete master of palace politics because his mind is keener than any of those surrounding him.

Give Mr. Ferrer the credit he richly deserves for the job he is doing at the City Center this season. The city owes him a medal and a banquet. But this is a prosaic Duke of Gloucester and an undistinguished "Richard III." That has to be said, also.

"RICHARD III"

Play by William Shakespeare; incidental music by Alex North; staged by Margaret Webster; scenery by Richard Whorf; costumes by Emeline Roche; revived by the New York City Theatre Company with Jean Dalrymple in charge of production at the New York City Center, December 9, 1953. The cast:

Richard.....Jose Ferrer
George.....Staats Cotsworth
Brackenbury....Paul Ballantyne
Lord Hastings..William Post Jr.
Anne.....Maureen Stapleton
Tressel.....Tom Tryon
Berkeley..Benedict MacQuarrie
A Priest.....G. Wood
Queen Elizabeth.....
Jessie Royce Landis
Earl Rivers.....Philip Huston
Lord Grey.....Bert Whitley
Duke of Buckingham.....
Vincent Price
Lord Stanley.....John Straub
Marquis of Dorset.....
Robert Lansing
Queen Margaret..Florence Reed
Catesby.....Eugene Stuckmann
1st Murderer...Martin Kingsley
2nd Murderer.....Jack Bittner
Edward IV.....Norman Roland
Young Clarence...John Glennon
Dowager Duchess of York....
Margaret Wycherly
1st Citizen.....Stanley Carlson
2nd Citizen.....Jack Fletcher
3rd Citizen.....Will Davis
Richard, Duke of York.....
Charles Taylor
Edward, Prince of Wales....
John Connoughton
Lord Mayor.....Leopold Badia
Bishop of Ely...James Arenton
Another Bishop.....
Wallace Widdecombe
Messenger.....Dehl Berti
Duke of Norfolk.....
Charles Sumners
Sir Richard Ratcliff.....
Jay Barney
Lord Lovel.....Robinson Stone
A Page.....Sandy Campbell
Sir James Tyrell.....
Kendall Clarke
1st Messenger....Peter Harris
2nd Messenger.....
Richard Cowdery
3rd Messenger...Robert Ludlum
Henry.....Douglas Watson
Sir James Blunt.....Bill Butler
Sir William Brandon.....
Vincent Donahue

DAILY NEWS
December 10, 1953

A Fascinating Company of Actors In 'Richard III' at the City Center

By JOHN CHAPMAN

Jose Ferrer, dogged, durable and dauntless, offered the third and most formidable drama of his four-play series last evening at the City Center. It was Shakespeare's "Richard III," directed by Margaret Webster and co-starring such public-spirited and theatre-minded worthies as Vincent Price, Jessie Royce Landis, Florence Reed, Maureen Stapleton, Margaret Wycherly, Philip Huston, Staats Cotsworth and William Post Jr.

Accompanying these distinguished playmates is a host of ladies-in-waiting and spear-carriers, making in all quite a colorful mob. The settings, in tones of charcoal and black, are the work of actor Richard Whorf, and they are so good, so right and so imaginative that I think Whorf should stop making money acting and starve, honorably and artistically, as a scenic designer.

Murder a Minute.

Unlike modern dramas, which are built around sofas, highballs and tea cozies, "Richard III" goes at a murder-a-minute clip. Any time Ferrer isn't bawling "Off with his head!" or, like a Fifteenth Century Capone, dooming somebody to strangulation or smotheration by a mere gesture, you may consider the pause a stage wait.

With extraordinary public spirit, the City Center provides not only a cast of characters but also a family-tree diagram of the Royal House of England as it stemmed from Edward III. This diagram is of some help, because it does indicate that the Edwardians finally simmered down to the comparatively simple Tudor kings and queens. But, even with the cast of characters and the genealogical map, "Richard III" is the most confusing family chronicle since some unknown historian first went to work on the Book of Genesis.

File and Forget.

When you go to the City Center, as I feel you might well do, my advice is to ignore the gossipy tidbits of Shakespeare, the columnist, and pay attention to Shakespeare, the dramatist, and his actors. If you try to remember that the Duke of Gloucester is really Richard; that Anne is the widow of Henry IV; that Elizabeth is the wife of Edward IV; that Elizabeth and Edward became parents of Jessie Royce Landis; that Henrys were piling up and dying so fast that Florence Reed is the widow of Henry VI; that the Dowager Duchess of York whelped Edward, Richard and Clarence—well, just forget all this and relax. You can't tell the players with a score card, even.

Relaxing, you will hear some stirring speeches and witness some exciting scenes. You will find Ferrer a malevolent and grimacing hunchback as Richard—and possibly difficult to hear except when he wants somebody's head off. At the performance I saw I was particularly pleased and excited by Miss Reed as Queen Margaret, Miss Landis as Queen Elizabeth, Vincent Price as the silky Buckingham and Douglas Watson as Richmond.

New York World-Telegram
and
The Sun
December 10, 1953

'Richard III' Puts Ferrer In Dark Mood

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

The City Center continues its Ferrer Festival this week with an ambitious production of one of the most dastardly plays ever written, Shakespeare's "Richard III."

The physical setting is striking. It permits the complicated action to flow easily without any joints showing. And its mood is stark and harsh as befits the grim nature of the play.

The family conflicts that go on in "Richard III" are wildly complex. The bloody action constantly re-assorts relationships, until it is impossible to hold in mind any true kinship. The theater has thoughtfully provided a genealogical table in the program, which at least gives direction to the family confusion.

The play's action pursues a single-minded course. Richard, who is Duke of Gloucester, is a bitter cripple with his mind set on the throne. Many figures stand in line for it ahead of him. The drama then is an unrelieved series of murders.

Series of Betrayals.

He betrays everyone until in the end he is killed in battle. The people Richard deals with and murders are neither stupid nor cowardly. Yet they are consistently taken in by him. It is the assignment of the chief actor to somehow give a shade of credibility to this procedure.

In this vital achievement, Mr. Ferrer is by no means as successful as you might expect him to be. His character lacks motive. You never quite know whether ambition, senseless revenge or gratuitous love of evil really drives him along his bloody course. So his relation to the other people never seems real.

The star has high dramatic moments, which hold you for the nonce, if they never make up for the lack of coherence. He treats asides as if he were a narrator. Talking directly to the audience, he makes the prospect of his schemes curdle the blood.

Every once in a while his wit has a chilling cynicism. And his final fight to the death makes you want to renovate your whole circulatory system.

"Richard III" is a play where the showy bits are apt to be the most telling roles. Vincent Price, for instance, in the long role of Buckingham, has to be so subservient and agreeable that he loses interest.

Powerful Curse.

Florence Reed, on the other hand, in the brief cursing scene as old Margaret, has all the ring and grandeur, the pomp and fire, that most of the company lacks. Maureen Stapleton has energetic excitement for the strange and difficult scene of Anne at the beginning. And Jessie Royce Landis is most touching and emotionally believable as the grieving Elizabeth. As one more unhappy Queen, Margaret Wycherly's tired last curse is most moving.

Kendall Clark portrays a man's moral self-destruction in a shattering and revealing few moments, as the murderer of the little Princes. And Douglas Watson, in what could be the pompous part of the final victor, plays with quite gripping sincerity.

Margaret Webster makes the play move with great authority and stages one of her incomparable battles, which you want to join in. Richard Whorf's scenery is ingenuity itself, in its brooding effects.

New York Post

December 10, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

Jose Ferrer as the Evil Richard

Jose Ferrer's impressive stature as an actor will, I think, neither increase nor diminish as the result of his portrait of Shakespeare's monstrous Richard III, which he showed New York theatergoers for the first time at the City Center last night. Being a player of immense capability, his characterization of the grotesque ogre of Tudor propaganda is malignant, cynical, hypocritical and doomed in the proper proportions, and he is always a vivid and interesting figure, but his playing lacks something of the depth and power of his best work.

It certainly isn't altogether his responsibility. Although "Richard III" is a savage and malicious melodramatic cartoon of considerable fascination, it is also a muddled and immature play, extremely confusing in its historical geneology and pretty superficial in its all-important villain. Since Shakespeare's central character is a two-dimensional scoundrel, the actor playing the role must round out the caricatured symbol of evil into a fairly recognizable human being if he is to give the performance real stature, and I don't think Mr. Ferrer quite does.

Two Possibilities

If I may grow slightly academic for a moment, I suspect Richard, if he is to be adequately effective in the theater, must either be made into a complete melodramatic grotesque, as Richard Whorf managed it in his amazingly underrated performance here several seasons ago, or be given a twisted and sardonically humorous semblance of perverted humanity, which is what I think Mr. Ferrer is trying to do. He almost succeeds, and there are moments of mocking laughter that are splendidly impressive. But he is also sometimes but mildly effective.

It is my impression that a really triumphant Richard should possess a plausibility in his hypocrisy that I found rather missing in the Ferrer characterization. It is a little difficult to believe that the Plantaganet, usurper of his portrayal would have fooled anybody. I certainly don't want to take away from the virtues of the performance. Mr. Ferrer brings an impressive wit, fire and horror to what he does, and no one who sees his work can doubt that he is an actor of unusual skill. It is merely that I have come to expect more of him.

The Melodrama

Although there is inescapable impressiveness in the sheer malevolence that Shakespeare put into the writing of "Richard III," I don't see how it can be denied that it is also a preposterous melodrama. Its villainy, whether or not it is justified by the facts of history, becomes wildly implausible on the stage. But it has a more serious defect for modern audiences. Its succession of murder and evil scheming is not only extravagant; it is also tremendously difficult to follow. I, for one, would hate to have to write a detailed outline of its maneuvering.

There are so many characters, and they either glower so balefully or cry out imprecations against Richard so incessantly, that it must be enormously difficult to give a believable performance in it. Nevertheless, Vincent Price seems to me an extraordinarily good Buckingham, and Florence Reed gives menacing power to her outbursts of hatred. The production is correctly lively and vigorous. Mr. Ferrer is always a stimulating actor, and his Richard unquestionably has its admirable points, but it disappointed me just a little.

Journal American

December 10, 1953

Excellent New Presentation

By JOHN McCLAIN

THIS Jose Ferrer is quite a considerable character. Operating under the auspices of the New York City Theatre, he gave us a couple of excellent weeks of "Cyrano de Bergerac," followed this with a production of his memorable "The Shrike" and last night presented "Richard III," an enormous and thoughtful and quite divergent interpretation of this Shakespearean classic.

It is absolutely baffling to me how anyone can handle so many words, rehearsing the while he is giving regular performances, and it would not have surprised me if he had come out and asked Brackenbury to get him out of the psycopathic ward or started to play Cyrano's balcony scene to Queen Elizabeth.

The fact remains he didn't. He gave a gifted and fluent performance, and the indications are that he will continue to run up the record of attendance he has already established at the popular-priced City Center hall.

"Richard III" is not my favorite offering from the pen of The Bard, but in this presentation which has been given unusual pace through the direction of Margaret Webster and an ingenious and highly effective scenic adaptation by Richard Whorf, it adds up to another gratifying evening.

The cast is eminent and excellent, but I would give major credit to the fact that it is the most facile production attempt to date launched with this cumbersome vehicle.

Scene Changes

Changes of scene are achieved through photographic slides projected against the back drop, curtains are moved here and there to limit the action, actors come onstage bringing their own furniture, lights rise and recede in various areas, and actors exit through the orchestra pit.

The result of all this succeeds in overcoming many endless and, to me, unexciting considerations of the problems of the Royal House of England in the 15th Century.

These considerations revolve around Richard III, known earlier as The Duke of Gloucester, a cripple who devoted his life to removing all possible ascendants to the throne so that he would get the job.

He thus arranges the demise of his brother, the Duke of Clarence, and has a couple of other contenders locked up in the Tower of London. He then succeeds to the throne, but gets his come-uppance a few years later when the Earl of Richmond kills him at Bosworth Field, in the War of Roses.

Brilliant Cast

Involved in all this violence are innumerable persons, most of them related, who were running the show in those days. Vincent Price, recovered from Hollywood, plays the role of the Duke of Buckingham and does so with distinction and authority.

Among the others in the big and brilliant cast are Florence Reed, Jessie Royce Landis, Maureen Stapleton, Staats Cotsworth and Margaret Wycherly. And of course Mr. Ferrer, in the title role, gives another entirely engaging and thoughtful performance.

It seems to me that this series of City Center offerings has more stature than any of the earlier efforts. It is certainly giving us good theatre, at the right price.

Daily Mirror

December 10, 1953

City Center Offering Starry 'Richard III'

By ROBERT COLEMAN

"Richard III" has a peculiar fascination for actors. Its title role has caught the fancy of most of the great stars of the British and American stages. It has represented triumph for some and defeat for others. It is a test—tricky and full of pitfalls—that calls for scope as well subtlety in projection.

The play itself is a rip-roaring melodrama, bloody, tempestuous and confusing. It is the death-rattle of the lengthy War of Roses, wherein, after rampant treachery and gore, the houses of Lancaster and York finally establish a line of Tudor monarchs. For it, Shakespeare fashioned mighty and memorable verse. It is eminently quotable.

HAVING GIVEN US successful revivals of "Cyrano de Bergerac" and "The Shrike" at the City Center earlier this season, Jose Ferrer is offering a not-so-successful "Richard III" there. This is regrettable, for Ferrer, at real personal sacrifice, is attempting to restore the drama to eminence and to found a repertory company of distinction.

The versatile Ferrer and his production associate, Jean Dalrymple, have persuaded some of our best actors to appear at the City Center for minimum Equity salaries. For "Richrad III," they have assembled a cast of fine players. It is a cast that a commercial management could not afford to engage. The salary list would be staggering.

RICHARD, though malformed, has a shrewd, resourceful mind. He wins a throne, if but for a brief span, through cunning, murder and determination. He is no clown. He makes Iago seem like an amateur at villainy. Yet Ferrer, mystifyingly, has chosen to etch him, via make-up and interpretation, as something of a jester, bordering on the ludicrous.

The key to an effective Richard, we think, was summed up in a curtain speech that Maurice Evans made after his triumph in "Hamlet": "I am happy that you liked our 'Hamlet.' I wanted to show that it is a rip-roaring melodrama, and not a study in dyspepsia." Well, "Richard III" is also rousing theatre. It calls for robust acting and ringing speech. And these qualities, Ferrer's Richard lacks.

By all odds, the most satisfying performance of the evening is that of Jessie Royce Landis, as the well-meaning but vacillating Queen Elizabeth.

FLORENCE REED, schooled in the tradition of the classics, is arresting and impressive as the Cassandra-like Queen Margaret. Margaret Wycherly brings the welcome authority of experience and skill to the Dowager Duchess of York. Maureen Stapleton, as Anne, has some excellent moments, though her voice is a bit shrill and her movements at times a bit unsure.

Vincent Price brings suave intelligence, though not enough robustiousness, to Buckingham.

NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

December 10, 1953

THEATER

'Richard III'

By WALTER F. KERR

THE City Center production of Shakespeare's "Richard III" comes to a rip-roaring climax in one of the most daring bits of stage business this reviewer has ever run across. A desperate Richard (Jose Ferrer) and a determined Richmond (Douglas Watson) are slugging it out on Bosworth Field with their bare fists.

Some one slips Richmond a dagger. The misshapen Richard dives for his armed adversary. The towering Richmond overreaches him to plunge the dagger into his back. Whereupon the dwarf-king summons every ounce of majesty that is in him, straightens up, hoists his enemy onto his shoulder and proceeds to climb a rocky terrain to the top of the stage—with Richmond hacking at him savagely every step of the way.

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The image is extravagant enough to border on the absurd, and to stir the beginnings of a titter out front. But its effrontery has real theatrical power. The sheer imaginative vitality of the episode is so stimulating as to silence our distrust of the supertheatrical to compel our respect, and to leave us grateful that some one has tried to jolt us out of our seats.

Not all of this "Richard III" is quite so exhilarating. The play is inevitably monotonous in its repeated but not especially varied intrigues, and there are times when Jose Ferrer seems simply to be walking a bloody treadmill. Occasional efforts to give the mayhem a special meaning—such as a swastika projected on the Tower of London, or an ominous band of "thought police" who break up a citizens' meeting—tend to vulgarize the action without honestly illuminating it.

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Mr. Ferrer himself is not yet prepared to build all the backstairs butchery to a personal crescendo. If he has the corrupt and conniving Duke of Gloucester completely in his grasp from the beginning, it remains in his grasp at precisely the same level of intensity throughout the evening. A Richard full grown at the outset is a Richard who has little left to tell us at 10 o'clock. And the actor's vocal equipment is still not flexible enough to knock the spots off the play's highest reaches.

There is, though, great intellectual fire in nearly every independent moment. Mr. Ferrer doesn't dodge, or apologize for, a scene in which he must woo a widow over her murdered husband's bier. He heads straight into it, candid, barefaced, callously confident. He curls his lip in insane glee as he recites a young prince's virtues and manages to make each of them sound like a vice. He gives rattled orders as a battle turns against him with affecting understanding of a doomed man's plight.

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Margaret Webster has staged the violent panorama with enormous fluidity. Nearly every revival of a well known play has its own contribution to make to our understanding—its own revelation of something not noticed before—and Miss Webster's particular success, I think, has been with the forlorn and flaming women of the castle. Scenes that are often passed over as pathetic grace notes emerge here in bold and moving relief. The stage tingles as Jessie Royce Landis bargains with Richard over a new young bride, as Maureen Stapleton learns with horror that she is wed to a king, as Margaret Wycherly screams at her crook-backed son over insistent drums.

It was to be expected that Florence Reed would roll out Margaret of Anjou's curses with rich and stunning relish. What Miss Reed—emerging ghostlike from the black recesses of the castle—has done above and beyond the call of duty is to show us how this famous passage is meant to outline and give shape to, the play. It is usually treated as a showy set piece; Miss Reed makes it characterize everybody in sight. She is so successful in her move that some two hours later, with Buckingham finally in chains, the customer behind me leaned to her companion and whispered, "See? That's what the old lady said would happen to him."

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The company as a whole is many notches above par. No performance is more striking than Kendall Clark's Tyrell, briefly remorseful over the murder of the boy Princes. William Post jr. is a vigorous Hastings, Vincent Price offers us an interestingly fly-by-night Buckingham, Douglas Watson is a grimly dedicated Richmond. In lesser roles, clear and colorful jobs are done by Eugene Stuckmann, Jack Bittner and Norman Roland.

"Kismet"

Please note opening night date as listed in cast box. New York newspapers have been delayed in printing the reviews due to publishing difficulties.

New York Post

December 20, 1953

By Richard Watts Jr.

Musical Adventure in Old Bagdad

There hasn't been a musical play like "Kismet" in town for quite a while, which is both its strength and its weakness. I think it is the strength, however, that will win out, because this elaborate extravaganza based on the late Otis Skinner's famous starring vehicle has a frankly old-fashioned amalgamation of statelines and sex, a mingling of handsome ponderousness and conscientious levity, which makes it an entertainingly nostalgic example of a virtually forgotten school. But don't expect the imaginative freshness of the newer school at the Ziegfeld Theater.

Let me recall, for the benefit of any newcomers, that "Kismet" was, and is, the romantic tale of a day in the life of a handsome and poetic beggar in legendary Bagdad. At the end of a fairly tumultuous 24 hours, Hajj has run a dizzy gamut between rags and riches, between execution as a bandit and fame as a wizard, incidentally marrying his daughter to the young Caliph, drowning the wicked Grand Wazir, running off to an oasis with the Wazir's gay widow, and putting the poet Omar to shame for the inadequacy of his rhymes.

Music and Dance

There is, of course, music and dancing. The music, I am told, is basically that of Alexander Borodin, but it has been modernized a trifle and given moderately bright lyrics by Robert Wright and George Forrest. I suspect that it falls somewhere between Borodin and Broadway in style and merit, but it suffices. The elaborate dances have been staged by Jack Cole, who has a gift for the pseudo-Oriental terpsichorean manner, and, although none of the numbers struck me as exactly inspired, there is plenty of sex to enliven them.

One of the chief virtues of the show is Alfred Drake, who is the dashing mendicant. Granted that Mr. Drake's musical-comedy heroes are pretty much alike, whether they are Oklahoma cowboys, Shakespearean rakes or bearded Bagdad beggars, it is still true that he plays them with humor, vast skill and authentic romantic style. He is easily the ablest man in the business at this sort of picturesque swagger, and he is at his best in "Kismet," which is saying a lot. Indeed, "Kismet" owes a great deal to Mr. Drake.

Two Girls

The daughter is played by Doretta Morrow, who is likewise an attractive expert at this kind of performing. Then, there is Joan Diener, who is the Wazir's wife and widow. Miss Diener is also one of the assets of "Kismet," but I'm not sure it's in the way she intends to be. An interestingly but perhaps extravagantly constructed girl, she is supposed to be the epitome of sex excitement, and maybe she is. I think, though, that her important merit is that, whether she means to or not, she makes physical allure irresistibly absurd.

Of the players less importantly employed, there are Richard Kiley, who was so good in "Misalliance" last season, as the Caliph; Henry Calvin, as the fairly comic villain, and Philip Coolidge has the only good comic role as the apologetic author of the Rubaiyat. Lemuel Ayers' sets and costumes are impressively colorful. The musical "Kismet" is heavy and literal in its romantic magnificence, and I wish it had more imagination and lightness, but there is something pleasantly solid about its reminiscent romanticism, and it makes an agreeable show.

"KISMET"

Musical comedy based on Edward Knoblock's play by the same name; book by Charles Lederer and Luther Davis; musical adaptation from Alexander Borodin's music by Robert Wright and George Forrest; lyrics by Messrs. Wright and Forrest; settings and costumes by Lemuel Ayers; staged by Albert Marre; dances by Jack Cole; presented by Edwin Lester at the Ziegfeld Theatre, December 3, 1953. The cast:

Imam of the Mosque..... Richard Oneto
Omar..... Philip Coolidge
A Public Poet..... Alfred Drake
Marsinah..... Doretta Morrow
A Merchant..... Kirby Smith
Hassan-Ben..... Hal Hackett
Jawan..... Truman Gaige
Akbar..... Jack Dodds
Assis..... Marc Wilder
Chief Policeman..... Tom Charlesworth
Wazir of Police... Henry Calvin
Lalume..... Joan Diener
Princesses of Ababu... Patricia Dunn, Bonnie Evans, Reiko Sato
Caliph..... Richard Kiley
Peddler..... Earle MacVeigh
Servant..... Richard Vine
Princess Zubbediya..... Florence Lessing
Ayah to Zubbediya.. Lucy Adonian
Princess Samaris..... Beatrice Kraft
Ayah to Samaris... Thelma Dare
Widow Yussef.... Barbara Slate

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

December 15, 1953

'Kismet' Soars Along As Gay Magic Carpet

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

It has become smart to remark that "Kismet" is a hit because the newspapers could not publish notices of its opening.

Well, a lot of people were haughty about "Can-Can." It has been playing to standees since the beginning of May. "Kismet" has a lot of the same vigorous, popular quality. It is noisy, spectacular, frank and vigorous.

This biggest and brightest of magic carpets, may not be subtle or original, but nobody intended it to be. It is melodic and gay. What's more it has one great virtue in that it continually spoofs itself. Such good natured beauty is hard to resist. What may be difficult to accept is only its sheer quantity.

Oriental Flavor.

Adapted from various scores by Borodin, the music is unconventional melody, rich in Oriental flavor, captivating and fresh. The story once served Otis Skinner for an endless run. It has been rebuilt into a maze of narrative. It has a sheen of logic, but no demand that it be taken seriously.

Alfred Drake is starred as a beggar poet, in the crazy prism of color that is Bagdad. He hurls the comic fantasy along its swirling course with his fine voice and his high style of charm. His number "Gesticulate" is a purposeful masterpiece that points up his artful method of performing.

Doretta Morrow is a real beauty as his daughter. She is fiery or wistful, and goes through tortures not unrelated to those she endured in "The King and I."

Mae West Successor?

Joan Diener seems to be a logical successor to Mae West. She is startlingly voluptuous, and nothing daunts her big singing voice. She also has a sly comic ability to toss away bawdy double entendres which can be captivating.

Richard Kiley makes an impressive singing debut as a handsome Caliph. He can act aristocratic and gracious without looking silly.

Henry Calvin is bluff and sinister as the wazir who ends up with only his feet out of water, and Philip Coolidge is of inestimable help in upholding the comic tone, as Omar Khayyam.

Hero Behind Scenes.

Jack Cole is usually a hero behind scenes of shows that he choreographs. This is once more true. He designed an evening-long, three-ply hit for the Misses Dunn, Evans and Sato as a trio of barbaric princesses. He also uses to exciting advantage the talents of Beatrice Kraft, Florence Lessing and a number of young men who must pose for the covers of muscle building magazines.

Charles Lederer and Luther Davis have kept the show whipping along a wisecrack-strewn track.

Lemuel Ayers never had a richer fanciful scene to paint. He has done it in terms of lovely wildest dreams.

The New York Times

December 4, 1953

Alfred Drake and Miss Morrow Appear in 'Kismet' With a Musical Score From Alexander Borodin

By BROOK ATKINSON

Having signed Alexander Borodin as composer, the manufacturers of "Kismet," which opened at the Ziegfeld Thursday evening, have quite a deep reservoir of music to draw on. Derived from nineteenth-century Russia, it is good music for turbulent dances and wild choruses; and some of it presumably has been freely adapted into songs suitable for a conventional operetta.

But perhaps the music is not so adaptable as the producers could wish. For it seems uneven and uncomfortable when applied to a musical spectacle that resembles nothing so much as a supercolossal Hollywood wonderwork. "Kismet" has not been written. It has been assembled from a storehouse of spare parts.

The book comes from Edward Knoblock's play, in which Otis Skinner became an American tradition many years ago. Add Borodin's music to Knoblock's play and you have the first assembly. But more parts have been fitted in. Lemuel Ayers has designed costly settings and costumes that are splendid and voluptuous. Jack Cole's dances are vivid, barbaric and imaginative. The production includes crowds of Oriental princes, dancing girls and beggars; jewels, gold pieces, bags of money, opulent processionals, high romance, low intrigue and some garnishings of Minsky. These are the principal ingredients of a grandiose show that is pretty heavy on its feet. Even in showmanship, the assembly method is no substitute for creation.

Not that "Kismet" lacks talent. The producers have bought the best. As Kismet, the ingenious rogue and adventurer, Alfred Drake gives a superb performance. He sings like a thoroughbred with one of the best male voices in the theatre. But Mr. Drake is also an immiensely resourceful actor who can carry off the set pieces with gusto and provide wit and humor on the side.

As his daughter, Doretta Morrow looks lovely and sings rapturously. Richard Kiley is an attractive prince of romance. As an abandoned hussy, brazenly made up and loosely clad, Joan Diener looks like a fine case of grand arson and warms up the whole show. There is an exquisitely beautiful Oriental dance by Beatrice Kraft as a princess from Bangalore. In fact, all the dancing is excellent, especially a garlanded wedding march at the opening of the second act.

Many theatregoers are completely satisfied with ostentatious productions that are as full of carnival magnificence as a costume ball. But to one theatregoer the rich massiveness of "Kismet" is stupefying. It is a display of wealth, but it is not a work of art. For the good things that are in it are not artistically related.

In the course of Kismet's tour of the fleshpots and bazaars many lyrics are tossed across the footlights on the melody of Borodin's music. The lyrics comprise some of the most fearful poetry of our time. Robert Wright and George Forrest make the English language sound insensitive and pretentious. Fortunately, most of the lyrics are unintelligible in the singing, though one line about "a nightingale singing at noon on a mulberry bud" does come through relentlessly.

And there's another. "Out of the commonplace into the rare!" the lyric writers exclaim with polite exaltation in one of their hottest moods of amour. "Kismet" never achieves the rare. It adheres strictly to the commonplace. Even Borodin cannot awaken anything inside the dazzling façade of a cumbersome show.

Journal American

December 9, 1953

Lavish Musical Gay and Terrific

By JOHN McCLAIN

THE MUSICAL "KISMET" which opened at the Ziegfeld Theatre the other night is lavish, tuneful and terrific; it supplies what the town has been groaning for the whole season—a big and bountiful extravaganza in the old time tradition.

There are scores of scrumptious-looking maidens expensively under-clad, there are enormous sets and fabulous effects, even the male members of the cast are gowned in silks and satins.

The Alexander Borodin music, skilfully adapted by Robert Wright and George Forrest, supplies a constantly engaging and sometimes exciting background, and the familiar Edward Knoblock book has been brilliantly souped-up and modernized by Charles Lederer and Luther Davis. And it provides an almost ideal vehicle for the swashbuckling talents of Alfred Drake.

The many machinations of the plot revolve around Hajj, a penniless poet, his daughter, Marasinah, and their tortuous tribulations in the acquisition of wealth and happiness. There is a glamorous Caliph, an indulgent Wazir, the decorative incumbents of various harems, dervishes, slave girls, divan dancers and all the manifold inhabitants of a mythical Baghdad.

Fine Melodies

There are several truly haunting melodies: "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," "Stranger In Paradise," "Fate" and "He's In Love," notably amongst them. There is an adroit and melodious performance by the very beautiful Doretta Morrow, as Alfred Drake's daughter, and a most seductive contribution by Joan Diener as Lalume, one of the Wazir's favorite wives. And the talented efforts of Richard Kiley as the Caliph; Henry Calvin as the Wazir; Philip Coolidge, Beatrice Kraft, Truman Gaige and Florence Lessing, in some of the other prominent parts.

Lemuel Ayers deserves particular kudos for the sets and costumes, and I thought he got a noble assist from Albert Marre for direction, and Jack Cole for the bright and stylized dances.

The cost of all this must have been colossal; but it's pleasant to report that the money was well spent. It may have to run forever to get the dough back—but I think it will.

Daily Mirror

December 9, 1953

'Kismet' Is a Hit, Drake Is Magnificent

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Otis Skinner scored a great success in Edward Knoblock's "Kismet" early in the century and in later revivals. It was a spectacle, with an Arabian Nights background, that caught the fancy of our sires. It also provided an appealing, showy role for an actor of scope.

Recently, Edwin Lester got the notion of turning "Kismet" into a musical extravaganza. He engaged Robert Wright and George Forrest to fashion a score from the music of Alexander Borodin, Charles Lederer and Luther Davis to pen a libretto after the Knoblock original. They brought off their projects in fine style.

LOOKING FOR an actor-singer to recreate the part so long associated with Skinner, Lester felicitously thought of Alfred Drake. It was an inspired idea, too, for Drake not only has an excellent voice, but is also a superlative showman. He has vitality, wit and deftness.

Lederer and Davis have taken liberties with the Knoblock script, though they have kept its essentials. Haji, the sly, roguish beggar has been replaced with a pretender, who assumes the mantles of poet and magician to wreak vengeance on his unscrupulous enemies and insure the happiness of his daughter. This change is all to the good for the purpose of song-and-dance.

Drake is magnificent as the fascinating rascal. He plays and sings him with gusto and grace. He has a lot of fun with the role, and manages to convey his enjoyment of it across the footlights. Doretta Morrow, of the persuasive voice, is irresistibly charming as his daughter.

PHILIP COOLIDGE, one of our more accomplished character actors, shines as Omar, the shrewd poet laureate to Caliph. There is an amusing by-play between Haji and Omar, with Haji commenting unfavorably on the quality of the latter's verses, which were to become immortal. Henry Calvin and Truman Gaige are first-rate as ruthless rivals.

Richard Kiley and Joan Diener, hitherto identified with straight plays, are outstanding as the likeable Caliph and philandering wife of his police chief. For newcomers to the musical stage, they act and sing like veterans.

List among the show-stoppers the exotic dancing of Beatrice Kraft, Florence Lessing, Patricia Dunn, Bonnie Evans and Reiko Sato, and the Oriental chantootsying of Lucy Adonian. The Misses Dunn, Evans and Sato, as three barbaric princesses, delighted the first-nighters.

* * *

LEMUEL AYERS has designed lavish settings and costumes. Jack Cole has devised sprightly, enchanting choreography. And Albert Marre has staged the book with skill.

"Kismet," here at the Ziegfeld is a joyous hit. This is colorful, flamboyant, melodic, opulent exciting theatre. The Wright Forrest arrangements are certain to put Borodin on the Hit Parade at long last. After all, the cognoscenti have had a monopoly on the great Alexander's music, via opera and ballet, for too long.

"Kismet" is going to do for Borodin what "Song of Norway" did for Grieg. You'll be hearing "Not Since Nineveh," "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," "Stranger in Paradise," "Night of My Nights," "This Is My Beloved" and "Rahadlakum" on records, radio and juke boxes. We had a wonderful time and think you will, too.

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NEW YORK **Herald Tribune**

THEATER

'Kismet'

By WALTER F. KERR

THERE is supposed to be something called a "strictly commercial entertainment, and I think "Kismet" is it. Charles Lederer and Luther Davis have taken Edward Knoxblock's gaudy old fantasy and splashed it all over the Ziegfeld stage. Dazzling slave girls slink by in chains, and very little else. Whole harems swim into view against a star-spangled sky. A rousing chorus of voices thunder out tunes rearranged from Borodin, and when Borodin straight isn't quite enough we get Borodin with a boogie-beat.

* * *

Alfred Drake is spectacularly present, ripping off a score that leaves room for his voice, cursing his enemies with rich and racy venom, swaggering raffishly in beggar's rags. Doretta Morrow darts on as his gamin daughter, looking lovelier perhaps than ever before, perfectly prepared to shatter the house chandeliers with the last long high notes of a romantic giant.

To go on with the catalogue of things you'll like: Lemuel Ayers has designed a stunning Oriental throne room in gold and black, and a lacquered latticework garden which is just right for lovers' partings; Jack Cole has stepped up the second act with a trio of torrid, and suitably exotic, dances; Albert Marre has staged the whole jeweled bazaar with a swirling and flamboyant gusto.

I guess about the only thing this song-and-dance "Kismet" hasn't got is any particular integrity—as satire, as Arabian Nights nonsense, as romantic moonshine, as honest operetta. It's the sort of sho what would sell its soul for a joke, and the jokes should be better at the price. Alongside a few touching moments, and quite a few dashing ones, there are vaudeville eruptions aching with weariness (the "Now?" "Now!" routine is given a compete workout twice). Alfred Drake is an extremely good man at throwing the worst of them away—if he can't make them funny, he ditches them plausibly—but there are times when labored lines must be roared if the show is to keep moving and even, Mr. Drake gets shrill in the process.

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It seems to me that Robert Wright and George Forrest have been fairly conscienceless about that Borodin score, too, respecting its quality whenever it suits them and chucking it for downbeat when things get desperate. The lyrics are passable in the more romantic moments. In comic vein, they tend to lean on snappers like "Don't underestimate Baghdad" or to make rather more than the most of such jogtrot rhymes as: "Not since that village named Gomorrah got/too hot/for Lot!" A kind of collegiate wit keeps popping its head up—and ducking.

* * *

Not that the evening doesn't have some pleasantly antic plot twists (the long-lost son of a murdering brigand turns up as the Chief of Police). It has small comic successes, besides. Philip Coolidge, for instance, is invariably amusing as a wistful Omar who hates being told he is a tenth-rate poet. Thanks to Mr. Drake, Miss Morrow, Joan Diener, and Richard Kiley, a number of the ballads fall pleasantly on the ear — "Stranger in Paradise," "Baubles, Bangles, and Beads" and "This Is My Beloved" among them.

On the whole, your response to "Kismet" is apt to depend on whether or not you're willing to take your pleasures piecemeal—and patently manufactured. The sponsors have put together a caravan of incidental splendors. But these are odd baubles, really, and they don't melt down into genuine gold

DAILY NEWS

December 9, 1953

Operetta 'Kismet' Big and Beautiful

By JOHN CHAPMAN

It has been too long a time since this town has had a new musical, and last Thursday evening we got a big and beautiful one called "Kismet" at the big and beautiful Ziegfeld Theatre. It is a fine thing for admirers of spectacle, lusty singing, very pretty girls and excellent dancing. But, being an operetta, it is quite sedate as to plot and hesitant as to humor.

"Kismet" has been based on one of my father's and your grandfather's favorite romantic comedies—a play of the same title which Edward Knoblock offered to Broadway on Christmas night, 1911, with Otis Skinner in the role of Hajj, a freebooting poet and con man of legendary Baghdad. Hajj, in the new musical version, is a scamp who has a beautiful daughter. Beautiful daughter weds the Caliph, of course. Hovering apologetically on the fringes of the plot is a tent manufacturer who composes poetry, too, named Omar. Hajj denounces Omar's line about the moving finger as trite, and this is about as close as anybody gets to a good joke at the Ziegfeld.

"Kismet" was produced with his customary opulence by Edwin Lester in Los Angeles, and is being offered here by Charles Lederer. Its music is credited to Alexander Borodin and has been worked over by Robert Wright and George Forrest, with, I suspect, a couple of scoops of Rimsky-Korsakov and Moussorgsky added. One song, "Baubles, Bangles and Beads," strikes me as the best of the show. Messrs. Wright and Forrest, who have gained a reputation for being clever with "Song of Norway," strive mightily to be clever with their "Kismet" songs, but they often mistake big long words and involved rhymes for wit.

The best things in "Kismet" are several. Alfred Drake and Doretta Morrow sing and act most attractively as Hajj and his daughter. Philip Coolidge is very amusing—because both he and Omar are so out of place in such an extravaganza—as Omar. The Arabian Nights settings and costumes, by Lemuel Ayers, are the best scenery west of Rockefeller Center.

Dances Are the Tops.

And the dances, staged by Jack Cole, are the best of all the elements in a generous show. The dancers, headed by Patricia Dunn, Bonnie Evans and Reiko Sato, have great wit and style. The style is, of course, pure Jack Cole, which is a Broadway mixture of Balinese and Javanese—but who nowadays knows the diff between Bali and Baghdad.

I do wish that Alfred Drake could have one big song number with a lot of sock in it—for instance, something titled "My Heart Belongs in Baghdaddy." As for the girls in "Kismet"—well, they are the prettiest young ladies I have seen in the Ziegfeld since Ziegfeld. And Joan Diener, who is put into the show in the interest of sex, rivals the Taj Mahal as an architectural gem.

"Madam, Will You Walk"

Please note opening night date as listed in cast box. New York newspapers have been delayed in printing the reviews due to publishing difficulties.

DAILY NEWS

December 9, 1953

A Phoenix Has Arisen From Nice, Live Ashes

By JOHN CHAPMAN

A playhouse of high purpose, the Phoenix, opened Tuesday evening of last week at Second Ave. and 12th St. with a production of the late Sidney Howard's "Madam, Will You Walk," a play which was once produced for Broadway with George M. Cohan in the leading role. The first offering was closed after out-of-town tryouts, and the Phoenix production is the first to be seen by New Yorkers.

"Madam, Will You Walk" could be termed an unresolved fantasy, if this weren't a contradiction of terms. In it can be found bright characters, sardonic opinion and some quick and funny Sidney Howard lines. In it also is more unjelled philosophical substance than all the rest of the current and dejected Broadway play list is able to offer. Howard, at least, was trying as a dramatist to stir the audience's imagination and the audience's conscience. His whimsical comedy is a predecessor of the more precisely finished and more satisfying T. S. Eliot venture into the supernatural, "The Cocktail Party."

A Home for New Ideas.

As a beginning for the Phoenix Theatre, "Madam, Will You Walk" is an admirable venture. The sponsors of this establishment, T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton, have created and bled for it as a place in which the theatre of ideas and experiment can be kept alive—because commercial Broadway is a small place for experiment and ideas at this time. Their dream is to make the Phoenix (which once was the Yiddish Art Theatre, later a movie house) a place where good actors, good productions and perhaps good plays can be seen at a $3 top—and a place, too, where these productions can pay for themselves within a time limit of six weeks.

The Setup is Good.

Thus, Messrs. Hambleton and Houghton are trying to do two things at the same time—to offer dramas worthy of intelligent consideration, and to break the economic garrotte which has been slowly and painfully choking the uptown stage for a decade. All praise to them, and some praise to "Madam, Will You Walk."

The comedy has ideas, the company is good and the three sets by Donald Oenslager are pictorial and efficient. The players include Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn, the stars, and such experienced troupers as Arthur Jarrett, John Randolph, Edwin Jerome, Susan Steell, Norman Lloyd and Robert Emmett. The theatre is a capacious and workable playhouse.

The title of "Madam, Will You Walk" is the first and perhaps most difficult hurdle of the evening. Like so many dramatists, past and present, Sidney Howard appears to have been stuck with what to call his thing after he created it, so he fell back upon poesy. The title comes from an old English folk song, which nobody but Howard Savage and James Garrett Wallace would ever know, about the devil wooing a girl.

The girl, in this case, is a wealthy Irish lass, daughter of a Tammany grafter who died in Sing Sing, who wants to give back her fortune to the people of New York by making them happy with concerts in Central Park. Through the machinations of a strange fellow named Dr. Brightlee, who may be devil or may be angel, the girl falls in love with a taxi driver. The girl becomes a female version of the Faust legend, but in this case the legend has a happy ending.

Unanswered Question.

There are some captivating and happy moments in the play, as well as some befuddling ones. Happiness reigns when the taxi driver puts on an impromptu dance behind the bandstand in the park; befuddlement takes over when a priest, a judge and a fairly ordinary man (standard Shavian symbols in a philosophical comedy) are challenged to figure out whether the mysterious Dr. Brightlee is Old Nick himself or the holder of a union card from heaven itself. Nobody is ever able to figure this out, which is why "Madam, Will You Walk" is an unresolved, but fairly interesting, fantasy.

"MADAM, WILL YOU WALK"

Play by Sidney Howard; staged by Hume Cronyn and Norman Lloyd; settings by Donald Oenslager; costumes by Alvin Colt; dances by Anna Sokolow; presented by T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton at the Phoenix Theatre, December 1, 1953. The cast:

Mrs. Broderick.. Madeleine King
Broderick..... Arthur Jarrett
Officer Mallon... John Randolph
Mrs. Fanaghy..... Susan Steell
Father Christy.. William Roerick
Judge Moskowitz.. Edwin Jerome
Miss Auchincloss.. Dorrit Kelton
Mr. Dockwiler.... Norman Lloyd
Mary Doyle..... Jessica Tandy
Dr. Brightlee..... Hume Cronyn
Scupper..... Robert Emmett
Alderman Doyle... David Clarke
Magistrate..... Leon Janney
Court Clerk..... David Hooks
Marshal..... Buff Shurr

Journal American

December 9, 1953

Wisdom and Humor In Play at Phoenix

By JOHN McCLAIN

IT SEEMS these people, T. Edward Hambleton and Norris Houghton, came up with this crazy idea that they could take over the old Jewish Art Theatre down on Second Avenue at 12th St., and convert it into something called the Phoenix Theatre where they could experiment with plays and maybe not get burnt to the degree they would if they tried these tactics on Broadway. The other night they teed off with "Madam, Will You Walk", by Sidney Howard, and starring Hume Cronyn and his ever-loving wife, Jessica Tandy.

Well, I want to tell you these people have hit a nerve. They have fixed up this tired theatre so that once you get inside you might as well be on 45th St., and they have also put on a profound production.

Good Writing

There are many faults in this play of Mr. Howard's, which may be why it laid an egg in Baltimore in 1939 when it was first tried out, but there is also much of wisdom, and humor and good provocative writing. And there are two superlative performances by the Cronyns, and others by Robert Emmett, Susan Steell, John Randolph, Edwin Jerome, Arthur Jarrett, Norman Lloyd, Leon Janney and William Roerick. There are a series of brilliant sets by Don Oenslager and a solid sense of professional theatre. It's worth the trip.

My sincere compliments to the Phoenix Theatre—producers, actors, technicians.

New York Herald Tribune

December 3, 1953

THEATER

'Madam, Will You Walk'

By WALTER F. KERR

"MADAM, WILL YOU WALK" is the devil's own play and, given enough time, he makes a good thing of it. In the late Sidney Howard's easygoing and pleasantly irreverent fantasy, written in 1939 but never performed in New York until the new Phoenix Theater took a chance on it Tuesday night, Hume Cronyn appears as a certain Dr. Brightlee.

Dr. Brightlee quite literally comes out of the woodwork. All day long odd things have been happening in the Fifth Avenue mansion of a former Tammany Hall politician. Doors have been popping open for no reason at all, chairs take to scuttling across the living-room floor, drapes have a habit of sliding gently and pointlessly apart.

When the not precisely good doctor finally does slip in out of nowhere, he is nattily attired in conservative black. His jacket, though, shows traces of red; and the shadow he casts on the wall is helpfully equipped with hooves and horns.

He is just in time to cheer up a dead politician's daughter. She is a wistful, winning, and fairly unpredictable sort (as fey as she could be, someone explains, "short of the booby hatch") and she is depressed over what has happened to her father. Seems he was a commanding rascal, a man "worth the attention of any Grand Jury," as fine a man as ever went to his Maker direct from the confines of Sing-Sing. The girl wants to know what is happening to the world. ("They're putting people in jail for things that used to be all right; a day will come when they'll put people in jail for things that are all right now!")

Dr. Brightlee is prepared to straighten everything out. He is also prepared to convince the girl, her assorted guardians, the entire population of Central Park, and finally a judge and jury that Satan has had a fairly constructive influence on the world. By the time he has put on a reasonably spectacular vaudeville show—green and red lights pop on, smoke puffs flare from the footlights, statues speak and animals roar from the nearest zoo—he has brought quite a few people around to his point. He fails only in persuading the girl to join him on a permanent and more personal basis.

* * *

At its best, Mr. Howard's urbane and impudent inversion of values is gaily good humored, playfully civilized. Its principal defect lies in the time it takes to get around to its best. While the author is feeling out the relationship betweeen his modern Marguerite and the visitor who can't abide any of the music from "Faust," there is a disconcerting aimlessness that almost slows the jest to an idle jog. We are a long spell waiting for any announcement of the play's intellectual intentions—a spell that is filled in with romantic idyils on a lagoon, unscheduled tap-dancing at a band concert, and various other improvisations.

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The manuscript was unedited and unrevised at the time of Mr. Howard's death, and it is impossible to say how much these earlier stages might have been sharpened and given firm direction at his hand. As things stand, the piece shifts from the Saroyanesque to the Shavian toward the end of the second act—and in the nick of time. With a brisk, funny, and explosive trial scene, the issues are trimly defined—and the evening holds its own thereafter.

Hume Cronyn is nicely droll as the relaxed, chatty, and altogether imperturbable demon, modestly admitting to having made a few mistakes now and then and snorting in majestic contempt when the girl who has been offered a worldful of lovers settles for a New York cabdriver. Jessica Tandy is delectable as an available lost soul, twisting her fingers in shy invitation, spinning about the stage in new-found exhilaration, climbing a statue and apologizing to the stone image of her beloved father.

* * *

The supporting company is not always up to the pace set by the stars. Norman Lloyd's temperamental musician seems to me to waver between farce and polite, meaningful fun; and Susan Steel's management of a testy Irish aunt is routine playing. But Robert Emmett's ambitious hackie is an appealing figure, and Dorrit Kelton and Leon Janney turn in effective bits.

"Madam, Will You Walk" is not going to overtake, or outlast, Sidney Howard's best-known gifts to the contemporary theater. But it's an interesting reflection of an interesting mind, and just about right for the popular-priced, off-Broadway Phoenix.

The New York Times

December 2, 1953

Sidney Howard's 'Madam, Will You Walk' Is Opener at the New Phoenix Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Things have begun auspiciously for the new Phoenix Theatre, which opened for business Tuesday evening at Twelfth Street and Second Avenue. Its first play is "Madam, Will You Walk," the last work of Sidney Howard, who died in 1939. After his tragic death it was acted on the road but withdrawn before its scheduled New York opening.

No one needs to be a tremendous genius to imagine that "Madam, Will You Walk" is still a trifle long, despite some vigorous preliminary cutting. But that's the only general criticism this column is willing to make against a gay, ironic, inventive fantasy that has a winning attitude toward the human race. It is the fable of a rich, unhappy maiden who wants to make New York a pleasant place to live in and has no talent for influencing people. But the devil appears in the guise of a cheerful adviser. His ingenuity, wisdom and tolerance and her general good will make a lucky combination, and the devil and the lady raise the spirits of New York tremendously.

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To those of us who have been strictly brought up to regard the devil as the father of all evil, the symbolism of the play is, if not obscure, at least confusing. Is Mr. Howard giving the devil credit for all the joy in the world and for civilization in general? Doubtless Mr. Howard covers this perplexing point somewhere in the metaphysics of his play and doubtless hundreds of alert intellectuals will write to this column to make everything clear and logical. Please do.

In the meantime, it may be sufficient to report that Mr. Howard's spook show is very funny, that it is inhabited by some original and temperamental people and that it makes a good many witty comments about the foibles of the human race. Nowadays we are accustomed to describing such topsy-turvy plays as Shavian. There is also some of the pagan joyousness of O'Casey in this one.

But describing Sidney Howard in terms of other eminent writers would be undervaluing the large heart, the wholesome humor and the literary versatility of one of the most admirable of American dramatists. "Madam, Will You Walk," overflowing with inventiveness and gusto, is further proof that Mr. Howard was just reaching full stature when he died.

The Phoenix Theatre has been organized to give actors and other theatre people a chance to work on plays for the fun of adventuring with off-beat enterprises. There is plenty of fun in this high-spirited performance. Hume Cronyn and Norman Lloyd, as co-directors, have applied a breezy pace and a light-hearted accent. In the part of the devil, Mr. Cronyn gives a devilishly cunning performance that certainly proves the point of the play. His casual combination of sardonic mischief and kindly feeling keeps the whole work pertinent, amusing and plausible.

Jessica Tandy plays the poor little rich girl with the neat sensitivity that distinguishes all her acting and with a romantic exultation particularly suited to this drama. Norman Lloyd's dry-humored portrait of a fatuous orchestra conductor, Robert Emmett's modest, engaging cab-driver who wants to be a hoofer, Susan Steell's humorous Irish widow with a good singing voice and an ample personality and Leon Janney's richly comic judge of a night court help to keep "Madam, Will You Walk" skipping.

Donald Oenslager has designed the four scenes with his usual instinct for detail and perhaps too literal an attitude toward a fantasy. The whole occasion is a happy one. Mr. Howard's play is both provocative and funny, like an adult fairy-story with a thoughtful theme. And the Phoenix Theatre, which may turn out to be a very valuable institution in New York, has put its best foot straightforward.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

December 14, 1953

Phoenix Players Approach a Repertory

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

A perennial question in theater circles is whether anything even vaguely like a repertory company can succeed in New York. It now appears that the Phoenix on 2nd Ave. and 12th St. comes closer than anything since Eva LeGallienne's Civic Repertory.

What it can mean in terms of enriching and making more flexible the whole structure of our drama, is inestimable. The Phoenix has opened with "Madam, Will You Walk?" It is the last play of Sidney Howard, one of America's top dramatists.

'If He'd Lived'—

Had Mr. Howard lived to polish this script it would have been distinguished and memorable. Now it is worthy, appropriate, attractive and heartening.

The play's fantastic aspects and its still urgent philosophy indicate a major advance for a fine writer.

"Madam" bursts with ideas. Not all are realized. Those that are provide food for thought that is most applicable today.

A shy heiress devotes her money to making the public happy. A supernatural figure in diabolical garb, bargains to help her. She falls in love with a dancing taxi driver who nearly breaks up her concerts in the Park.

Prone to Slavery.

The mysterious stranger's magic saves them from jail. He wants to encourage curiosity, which alone can bring knowledge. He lauds individuality, and says men are prone to slavery because it is comfortable. He wants to help restore "a gay shape to the world."

In his free paraphrase of "Faust," Mr. Howard makes the benevolent Devil symbolize the outdating of moral concepts. He abominates hypocrisy, and pleads for active thought and decisiveness, never anarchy.

His theme is "the only sin is to let well enough alone." If we do not learn and let ideas of good and evil grow, we mildew.

Tandy and Cronyn.

Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn spark this premiere bill of the Phoenix with acute, understanding performances. Miss Tandy grows out of shy gentleness to high exhilaration. Mr. Cronyn gives the mystic a highly fitting, off beat magnetism.

Norman Lloyd is precise and proud as the conductor, and Robert Emmett has very bright moments as the taxi driver. Leon Janney is a Bobby Clarkish Judge, and Susan Steell is caustic and musical as an Irish aunt of the heroine. William Roerick makes a perfectly clear, consistent figure of the Priest, and Edwin Jerome is a magisterial advocate of status quo.

Lovely Sets.

Donald Oenslager has provided the production with a series of rich and lovely sets.

Without delving into the difficult intricacies of keeping together a permanent company and alternating plays, the Phoenix is content with limited runs. Next bill, "Coriolanus."